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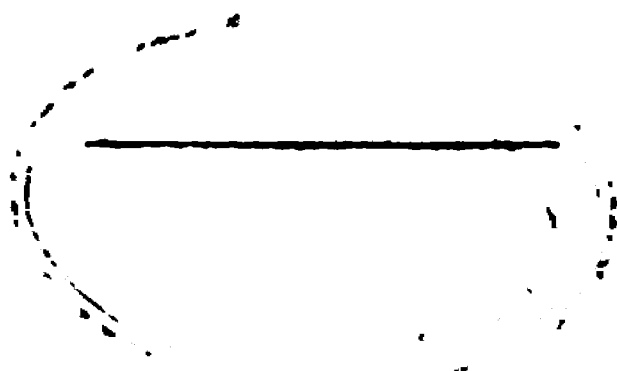
MACLEOD OF DARE.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF

"A PRINCESS OF THULE," "THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A
PHAETON," "A DAUGHTER OF HETH," ETC., ETC.

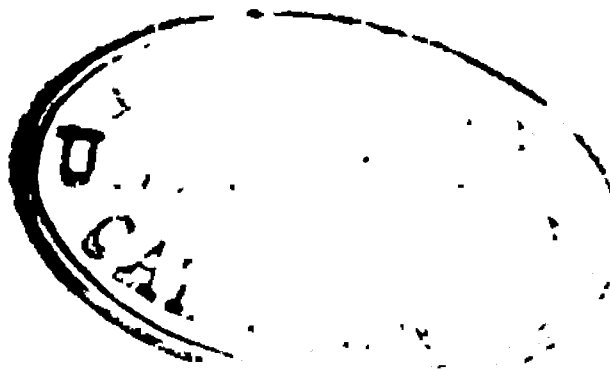


NEW YORK:

JOHN B. ALDEN, PUBLISHER,

1883.

23469



MACLEOD OF DARE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SIX BOYS OF DARE.

THE sun had sunk behind the lonely western seas ; Ulva, and Lunga, and the Dutchman's Cap had grown dark on the darkening waters ; and the smooth Atlantic swell was booming along the sombre caves ; but up here in Castle Dare, on the high and rocky coast of Mull, the great hall was lit with such a blaze of candles as Castle Dare had but rarely seen. And yet there did not seem to be any grand festivities going forward ; for there were only three people seated at one end of the long and narrow table ; and the banquet that the faithful Hamish had provided for them was of the most frugal kind. At the head of the table sat an old lady with silvery-white hair and proud and fine features. It would have been a keen and haughty face but for the unutterable sadness of the eyes—blue-gray eyes under black eyelashes that must have been beautiful enough in her youth, but were now dimmed and worn, as if the weight of the world's sorrows had been too much for the proud, high spirit. On the right of Lady Macleod sat the last of her six sons, Keith by name, a tall, sparely built, sinewy young fellow, with a sun-tanned cheek and crisp and curling hair, and with a happy and careless look in his clear eyes and about his mouth that rather blinded one to the firm lines of his face. Glad youth shone there, and the health begotten of hard exposure to wind and

weather. What was life to him but a laugh : so long as there was a prow to cleave the plunging seas, and a glass to pick out the branching antlers far away amidst the mists of the corrie ? To please his mother, on this the last night of his being at home, he wore the kilts ; and he had hung his broad blue bonnet, with its sprig of juniper—the badge of the clan—on the top of one of many pikes and halberds that stood by the great fireplace. Opposite him, on the old lady's left hand, sat his cousin, or rather half-cousin, the plain-featured but large-hearted Janet, whom the poor people about that neighborhood regarded as being something more than any mere mortal woman. If there had been any young artist among that Celtic peasantry fired by religious enthusiasm to paint the face of a Madonna, it would have been the plain features of Janet Macleod he would have dreamed about and striven to transfer to his canvas. Her eyes were fine, it is true : they were honest and tender ; they were not unlike the eyes of the grand old lady who sat at the head of the table ; but, unlike hers, they were not weighted with the sorrow of years.

"It is a dark hour you have chosen to go away from your home," said the mother ; and the lean hand, resting on the table before her, trembled somewhat.

"Why, mother," the young man said, lightly, "you know I am to have Captain ——'s cabin as far as Greenock ; and there will be plenty of time for me to put the kilts away before I am seen by the people."

"Oh, Keith," his cousin cried—for she was trying to be very cheerful, too—"do you say that you are ashamed of the tartan ?"

"Ashamed of the tartan !" he said, with a laugh. "Is there any one who has been brought up at Dare who is likely to be ashamed of the tartan ! When I am ashamed of the tartan I will put a pigeon's feather in my cap, as the new *suaicheantas* of this branch of Clann Leoid. But then, my good Janet, I would as soon think of taking my rifle and the dogs through the streets of London as of wearing the kilts in the south."

The old lady paid no heed. Her hands were now clasped before her. There was sad thinking in her eyes.

"You are the last of my six boys," said she, "and you are going away from me too."

"Now, now, mother," said he, "you must not make so

much of a holiday. You would not have me always at Dare? You know that no good comes of a stay-at-home."

She knew the proverb. Her other sons had not been stay-at-homes. What had come to them!

Of Sholto, the eldest, the traveller, the dare-devil, the grave is unknown; but the story of how he met his death, in far Arizona, came years after to England and to Castle Dare. He sold his life dearly, as became one of his race and name. When his cowardly attendants found a band of twenty Apaches riding down on them, they unhitched the mules and galloped off, leaving him to confront the savages by himself. One of these, more courageous than his fellows, advanced and drew his arrow to the barb; the next second he uttered a yell, and rolled from his saddle to the ground, shot through the heart. Macleod seized this instant, when the savages were terror-stricken by the precision of the white man's weapons, to retreat a few yards and get behind a mesquite-tree. Here he was pretty well sheltered from the arrows that they sent in clouds about him, while he succeeded in killing other two of his enemies who had ventured to approach. At last they rode off: and it seemed as though he would be permitted to rejoin his dastardly comrades. But the Indians had only gone to windward to set the tall grass on fire; and presently he had to scramble, burned and blinded, up the tree, where he was an easy mark for their arrows. Fortunately, when he fell he was dead. This was the story told by some friendly Indians to a party of white men, and subsequently brought home to Castle Dare.

The next four of the sons of Dare were soldiers, as most of the Macleods of that family had been. And if you ask about the graves of Roderick and Ronald, what is one to say? They are known, and yet unknown. The two lads were in one of the Highland regiments that served in the Crimea. They both lie buried on the bleak plains outside Sevastopol. And if the memorial stones put up to them and their brother officers are falling into ruin and decay—if the very graves have been rifled—how is England to help that? England is the poorest country in the world. There was a talk some two or three years ago of putting up a monument on Cathcart Hill to the Englishmen who died in the Crimea; and that at least would have been some token of remembrance, even if we could not collect the scattered remains of our slain sons, as the French have done. but then that monument would have cost £5000. How could England afford

£5000? When a big American city takes fire, or when a district in France is inundated, she can put her hand into her pocket deeply enough; but how can we expect so proud a mother to think twice about her children who perished in fighting for her? Happily the dead are independent of forgetfulness.

Duncan the Fair-haired—Donacha Ban, they called him, far and wide among the hills—lies buried in a jungle on the African coast. He was only twenty-three when he was killed: but he knew he had got the Victoria Cross. As he lay dying, he asked whether the people in England would send it to his mother, showing that his last fancies were still about Castle Dare.

And Hector? As you cross the river at Sadowa, and pass through a bit of forest, some cornfields begin to appear, and these stretch away up to the heights of Chlum. Along the ridge there, by the side of the wood, are many mounds of earth. Over the grave of Hector Macleod is no proud and pathetic inscription such as marks the last resting-place of a young lieutenant who perished at Gravelotte—*Er ruht saft in wiedererkämpfter deutscher Erde*—but the young Highland officer was well beloved by his comrades, and when the dead were being pitched into the great holes dug for them, and when rude hands were preparing the simple record, painted on a wooden cross—“*Hier liegen—tapfere Krieger*”—a separate memento was placed over the grave of Under-lieutenant Hector Macleod of the——th Imperial and Royal Cavalry Regiment. He was one of the two sons who had not inherited the title. Was it not a proud boast for this white-haired lady in Mull that she had been the mother of four baronets? What other mother in all the land could say as much? And yet it was that that had dimmed and saddened the beautiful eyes.

And now her youngest—her Benjamin, her best-beloved—he was going away from her too. It was not enough that the big deer forest, the last of the possessions of the Macleods of Dare, had been kept intact for him, when the letting of it to a rich Englishman would greatly have helped the failing fortunes of the family; it was not enough that the poor people about, knowing Lady Macleod's wishes, had no thought of keeping a salmon spear hidden in the thatch of their cottages. Salmon and stag could no longer bind him to the place. The young blood stirred. And when he asked

her what good things came of being a stay-at-home, what could she say?

Suddenly old Hamish threw wide the oaken doors at the end of the hall, and there was a low roar like the roaring of lions. And then a young lad, with the pipes proudly perched on his shoulder, marched in with a stately step, and joyous and shrill arose the Salute. Three times he marched round the long and narrow hall, finishing behind Keith Macleod's chair. The young man turned to him.

"It was well played, Donald," said he, in the Gaelic; "and I will tell you that the Skye College in the old times never turned out a better pupil. And will you take a glass of whiskey now, or a glass of claret? And it is a great pity your hair is red, or they would call you Donull Dubh, and people would say you were the born successor of the last of the MacCruimins."

At this praise—imagine telling a piper lad that he was a fit successor of the MacCruimins, the hereditary pipers of the Macleods—the young stripling blushed hot; but he did not forget his professional dignity for all that. And he was so proud of his good English that he replied in that tongue.

"I will take a glass of the claret wine, Sir Keith," said he.

Young Macleod took up a horn tumbler, rimmed with silver, and having the triple-towered castle of the Macleods engraved on it, and filled it with wine. He handed it to the lad.

"I drink your health, Lady Macleod," said he, when he had removed his cap; "and I drink your health, Miss Macleod; and I drink your health, Sir Keith; and I would have a lighter heart this night if I was going with you away to England."

It was a bold demand.

"I cannot take you with me, Donald; the Macleods have got out of the way of taking their piper with them now. You must stay and look after the dogs."

"But you are taking Oscar with you, Sir Keith."

"Yes, I am. I must make sure of having one friend with me in the south."

"And I think I would be better than a collie," muttered the lad to himself, as he moved off in a proud and hurt way toward the door, his cap still in his hand.

And now a great silence fell over these three; and Janet Macleod looked anxiously toward the old lady, who sat un

moved in the face of the ordeal through which she knew she must pass. It was an old custom that each night a pibroch should be played in Castle Dare in remembrance of her five slain sons ; and yet on this one night her niece would fain have seen that custom abandoned. For was not the pibroch the famous and pathetic "Cumhadh na Cloinne," the Lament for the Children, that Patrick Mor, one of the pipers of Macleod of Skye, had composed to the memory of his seven sons, who had all died within one year ? And now the doors were opened, and the piper boy once more entered. The wild, sad wail arose : and slow and solemn was the step with which he walked up the hall. Lady Macleod sat calm and erect, her lips proud and firm, but her lean hands were working nervously together ; and at last, when the doors were closed on the slow and stately and mournful Lament for the Children, she bent down the silvery head on those wrinkled hands and wept aloud. Patrick Mor's seven brave sons could have been no more to him than her six tall lads had been to her ; and now the last of them was going away from her.

"Do you know," said Janet, quickly, to her cousin across the table, "that it is said no piper in the West Highlands can play 'Lord Lovat's Lament' like our Donald ?"

"Oh yes, he plays it very well ; and he has got a good step," Macleod said. "But you will tell him to play no more Laments to-night. Let him take to strathspeys if any of the lads come up after bringing back the boat. It will be time enough for him to make a Lament for me when I am dead. Come, mother, have you no message for Norman Ogilvie ?"

The old lady had nerved herself again, though her hands were still trembling.

"I hope he will come back with you, Keith," she said.

"For the shooting ? No, no, mother. He was not fit for the shooting about here : I have seen that long ago. Do you think he could lie for an hour in a wet bog ? It was up at Fort William I saw him last year, and I said to him, 'Do you wear gloves at Aldershot ?' His hands were as white as the hands of a woman."

"It is no woman's hand you have, Keith," his cousin said ; "it is a soldier's hand."

"Yes," said he, with his face flushing, "and if I had had Norman Ogilvie's chance—"

But he paused. Could he reproach this old dame, on the very night of his departure, with having disappointed all those dreams of military service and glory that are almost the

natural inheritance of a Macleod of the Western Highlands? If he was a stay-at-home, at least his hands were not white. And yet, when young Ogilvie and he studied under the same tutor—the poor man had to travel eighteen miles between the two houses, many a time in hard weather—all the talk and aspirations of the boys were about a soldier's life; and Macleod could show his friend the various trophies, and curiosities sent home by his elder brothers from all parts of the world. And now the lily-fingered and gentle-natured Ogilvie was at Aldershot; while he—what else was he than a mere deer-stalker and salmon-killer?

“Ogilvie has been very kind to me, mother,” he said, laughing. “He has sent me a list of places in London where I am to get my clothes, and boots, and a hat; and by the time I have done that, he will be up from Aldershot, and will lead me about—with a string round my neck, I suppose, lest I should bite somebody.”

“You could not go better to London than in your own tartan,” said the proud mother; “and it is not for an Ogilvie to say how a Macleod should be dressed. But it is no matter, one after the other has gone; the house is left empty at last. And they all went away like you, with a laugh on their face. It was but a trip, a holiday, they said: they would soon be back to Dare. And where are they this night?”

Old Hamish came in.

“It will be time for the boat now, Sir Keith, and the men are down at the shore.”

He rose, the handsome young fellow, and took his broad, blue bonnet with the badge of juniper.

“Good-by, cousin Janet,” said he, lightly. “Good-by, mother. You are not going to send me away in this sad fashion? What am I to bring you back—a satin gown from Paris? or a young bride to cheer up the old house?”

She took no heed of the passing jest. He kissed her, and bade her good-by once more. The clear stars were shining over Castle Dare, and over the black shadows of the mountains, and the smoothly swelling waters of the Atlantic. There was a dull booming of the waves along the rocks.

He had thrown his plaid round him, and he was wondering to himself as he descended the steep path to the shore. He could not believe that the two women were really saddened by his going to the south for awhile; he was not given to forebodings. And he had nearly reached the shore, when he was overtaken by some one running, with a light

step behind him. He turned quickly, and found his cousin before him, a shawl thrown round her head and shoulders.

"Oh, Keith," said she, in a bright and matter-of-fact way, "I have a message for you—from myself—and I did not want aunt to hear, for she is very proud, you know, and I hope you won't be. You know we are all very poor, Keith; and yet you must not want money in London, if only for the sake of the family; and you know I have a little, Keith, and I want you to take it. You won't mind my being frank with you. I have written a letter."

She had the envelope in her hand.

"And if I would take money from any one, it would be from you, Cousin Janet; but I am not so selfish as that. What would all the poor people do if I were to take your money to London and spend it?"

"I have kept a little," said she, "and it is not much that is needed. It is £2000 I would like you to take from me, Keith. I have written a letter."

"Why, bless me, Janet, that is nearly all the money you've got!"

"I know it."

"Well, I may not be able to earn any money for myself, but at least I would not think of squandering your little fortune. No, no; but I thank you all the same, Janet; and I know that it is with a free heart that you offer it."

"But this is a favor, Keith," said she. "I do not ask you, to spend the money. But you might be in trouble; and you would be too proud to ask any one—perhaps you would not even ask me; and here is a letter that you can keep till then, and if you should want the money, you can open the letter, and it will tell you how to get it."

"And it is a poor forecast you are making, Cousin Janet," said he, cheerfully. "I am to play the prodigal son, then? But I will take the letter. And good-bye again, Janet; and God bless you, for you are a kind-hearted woman."

She went swiftly up to Castle Dare again, and he walked on toward the shore. By-and-by he reached a small stone pier that ran out among some rocks, and by the side of it lay a small sailing launch, with four men in her, and Donald the piper boy perched up at the bow. There was a lamp swinging at her mast, but she had no sail up, for there was scarcely any wind.

"Is it time to go out now?" said Macleod to Hamish

who stood waiting on the pier, having carried down his master's portmanteau.

"Ay, it will be time now, even if you will wait a little," said Hamish. And then the old man added, "It is a dark night, Sir Keith, for your going away from Castle Dare."

"And it will be the brighter morning when I come back," answered the young man, for he could not mistake the intention of the words.

"Yes, indeed, Sir Keith; and now you will go into the boat, and you will take care of your footing, for the night is dark, and the rocks they are always slippery whatever."

But Keith Macleod's foot was as familiar with the soft seaweed of the rocks as it was with the hard heather of the hills, and he found no difficulty in getting into the broad-beamed boat. The men put out their oars and pushed her off. And now, in the dark night, the skirl of the pipes rose again; and it was no stately and mournful lament that young Donald played up there at the bow as the four oars struck the sea and sent a flash of white fire down into the deeps.

"Donald," Hamish had said to him on the shore, "when you are going out to the steamer, it is the 'Seventy-ninth's Farewell to Chubralter' that you will play, and you will play no other thing than that."

And surely the Seventy-ninth were not sorry to leave Gibraltar when their piper composed for them so glad a farewell.

At the high windows of Castle Dare the mother stood, and her niece, and as they watched the yellow lamp move slowly out from the black shore, they heard this proud and joyous march that Donald was playing to herald the approach of his master. They listened to it as it grew fainter and fainter, and as the small yellow star trembling over the dark waters became more and more remote. And then this other sound—this blowing of a steam whistle far away in the darkness?

"He will be in good time, aunt; she is a long way off yet," said Janet Macleod. But the mother did not speak.

Out there on the dark and moving waters the great steamer was slowly drawing near the open boat; and as she came up, the vast hull of her, seen against the starlit sky, seemed a mountain.

"Now, Donald," Macleod called out, "you will take the dog—here is the string; and you will see he does not spring into the water."

"Yes, I will take the dog," muttered the boy, half to

himself. "Oh yes, I will take the dog; but it is better if I was going with you, Sir Keith, than any dog."

A rope was thrown out, the boat dragged up to the side of the steamer, the small gangway let down, and presently Macleod was on the deck of the large vessel. Then Oscar was hauled up too, and the rope flung loose, and the boat drifted away into the darkness. But the last good-bye had not been said, for over the black waters came the sound of pipes once more, the melancholy wail of "Macintosh's Lament."

"Confound that obstinate brat!" Macleod said to himself. "Now he will go back to Castle Dare and make the women miserable."

"The captain is below at his supper, Sir Keith," said the mate. "Will you go down to him?"

"Yes, I will go down to him," said he; and he made his way along the deck of the steamer.

He was arrested by the sound of some one crying, and he looked down, and found a woman crouched under the bulwarks, with two small children asleep on her knee.

"My good woman, what is the matter with you?" said he.

"The night is cold," she said in the Gaelic, "and my children are cold; and it is a long way that we are going."

He answered her in her own tongue.

"You will be warmer if you go below; but here is a plaid for you, anyway;" and with that he took the plaid from round his shoulders and flung it across the children, and passed on.

That was the way of the Macleods of Dare. They had a royal manner with them. Perhaps that was the reason that their revenues were now far from royal.

And meanwhile the red light still burned in the high windows of Castle Dare, and two women were there looking out on the pale stars and the dark sea beneath. They waited until they heard the plashing of oars in the small bay below, and the message was brought them that Sir Keith had got safely on board the great steamer. Then they turned away from the silent and empty night, and one of them was weeping bitterly.

"It is the last of my six sons that has gone from me," she said, coming back to the old refrain, and refusing to be comforted.

"And I have lost my brother," said Janet Macleod, in

her simple way. "But he will come back to us, auntie; and then we shall have great doings at Castle Dare."

CHAPTER II.

MENTOR.

IT was with a wholly indescribable surprise and delight that Macleod came upon the life and stir and gayety of London in the sweet June time, when the parks and gardens and squares would of themselves have been a sufficient wonder to him. The change from the sombre shores of lochs Na Keal, and Iua, and Scridain to this world of sunlit foliage—the golden yellow of the laburnum, the cream-white of the chestnuts, the rose-pink of the red hawthorn, and everywhere the keen, translucent green of the young lime-trees—was enough to fill the heart with joy and gladness, though he had been no diligent student of landscape and color. The few days he had to spend by himself—while getting properly dressed to satisfy the demands of his friend—passed quickly enough. He was not at all ashamed of his country-made clothes as he watched the whirl of carriages in Piccadilly, or lounged under the elms at Hyde Park, with his beautiful silver-white and lemon-colored collie attracting the admiration of every passer-by. Nor had he waited for the permission of Lieutenant Ogilvie to make his entrance into, at least, one little corner of society. He was recognized in St. James's Street one morning by a noble lady whom he had met once or twice at Inverness; and she, having stopped her carriage, was pleased to ask him to lunch with herself and her husband next day. To the great grief of Oscar, who had to be shut up by himself, Macleod went up next day to Brook Street, and there met several people whose names he knew as representatives of old Highland families, but who were very English, as it seemed to him, in their speech and ways. He was rather petted, for he was a handsome lad, and he had high spirits and a proud air. And his hostess was so kind as to mention that the Caledonian Ball was coming off on the 25th, and of course he must come, in the Highland costume; and as she was one of the patronesses, should she give him a voucher?

Macleod answered, laughingly, that he would be glad to have it, though he did not know what it was; whereupon she was pleased to say that no wonder he laughed at the notion of a voucher being wanted for any Macleod of Dare.

One morning a good-looking and slim young man knocked at the door of a small house in Bury Street, St. James's, and asked if Sir Keith Macleod was at home. The man said he was, and the young gentleman entered. He was a most correctly dressed person. His hat, and gloves, and cane, and long-tailed frock-coat were all beautiful; but it was, perhaps, the tightness of his nether garments, or, perhaps, the tightness of his brilliantly-polished boots (which were partially covered by white gaiters), that made him go up the narrow little stairs with some precision of caution. The door was opened and he was announced.

"My dear old boy," said he, "how do you do?" and Macleod gave him a grip of the hand that nearly burst one of his gloves.

But at this moment an awful accident occurred. From behind the door of the adjacent bedroom, Oscar, the collie, sprang forward with an angry growl; then he seemed to recognize the situation of affairs, when he saw his master holding the stranger's hand; then he began to wag his tail; then he jumped up with his fore-paws to give a kindly welcome.

"Hang it all, Macleod!" young Ogilvie cried, with all the starch gone out of his manner; "your dog's all wet? What's the use of keeping a brute like that about the place?"

Alas! the beautiful, brilliant boots were all besmeared, and the white gaiters too, and the horsey-looking nether garments. Moreover, the Highland savage, so far from betraying compunction, burst into a roar of laughter.

"My dear fellow," he cried, "I put him in my bedroom to dry. I couldn't do more, could I? He has just been in the Serpentine."

"I wish he was there now, with a stone and a string round his neck!" observed Lieutenant Ogilvie, looking at his boots; but he repented him of this rash saying, for within a week he had offered Macleod £20 for the dog. He might have offered twenty dozen of £20, and thrown his polished boots and his gaiters too into the bargain, and he would have had the same answer.

Oscar was once more banished into the bedroom; and Mr. Ogilvie sat down, pretending to take no more notice of his boots. Macleod put some sherry on the table, and a

handful of cigars ; his friend asked whether he could not have a glass of seltzer-water and a cigarette.

" And how do you like the rooms I got for you ? "

" There is not much fresh air about them, nor in this narrow street," Macleod said, frankly ; " but that is no matter for I have been out all day—all over London."

" I thought the price was as high as you would care to go," Ogilvie said ; " but I forgot you had come fresh up, with your pocket full of money. If you would like something a trifle more princely, I'll put you up to it."

" And where have I got the money ? There are no gold mines in the west of Mull. It is you who are Fortunatus."

" By Jove, if you knew how hard a fellow is run at Aldershot," Mr. Ogilvie remarked, confidentially, " you would scarcely believe it. Every new batch of fellows who come in have to be dined all round ; and the mess bills are simply awful. It's getting worse and worse ; and then these big drinks put one off one's work so."

" You are studying hard, I suppose," Macleod said, quite gravely.

" Pretty well," said he, stretching out his legs, and petting his pretty mustache with his beautiful white hand. Then he added, suddenly, surveying the brown-faced and stalwart young fellow before him, " By Jove, Macleod, I'm glad to see you in London. It's like a breath of mountain air. Don't you remember the awful mornings we've had together—the rain and the mist and the creeping through the bogs ? I believe you did your best to kill me. If I hadn't had the constitution of a horse, I should have been killed."

" I should say your big drinks at Aldershot were more likely to kill you than going after the deer," said Macleod, " And will you come up with me this autumn, Ogilvie ? The mother will be glad to see you, and Janet, too ; though we haven't got any fine young ladies for you to make love to, unless you go up to Fort William, or Fort George, or Inverness. And I was all over the moors before I came away ; and if there is anything like good weather, we shall have plenty of birds this year, for I never saw before such a big average of eggs in the nests."

" I wonder you don't let part of that shooting," said young Ogilvie, who knew well of the straitened circumstances of the Macleods of Dare.

" The mother won't have it done," said Macleod, quite simply, " for she thinks it keeps me at home. But a young

man cannot always stay at home. It is very good for you, Ogilvie, that you have brothers."

"Yes, if I had been the eldest of them," said Mr. Ogilvie. "It is a capital thing to have younger brothers; it isn't half so pleasant when you are the younger brother."

"And will you come up, then, and bury yourself alive at Dare?"

"It is awfully good of you to ask me, Macleod; and if I can manage it, I will; but I am afraid there isn't much chance this year. In the meantime, let me give you a hint. In London we talk of going *down* to the Highlands."

"Oh, do you? I did not think you were so stupid," Macleod remarked.

"Why, of course we do. You speak of going up to the capital of a country, and of going down to the provinces."

"Perhaps you are right—no doubt you are right; but it sounds stupid," the unconvinced Highlander observed again. "It sounds stupid to say going up to the south, and going down to the north. And how can you go down to the Highlands? you might go down to the Lowlands. But no doubt you are right; and I will be more particular. And will you have another cigarette? and then we will go out for a walk, and Oscar will get drier in the street than indoors."

"Don't imagine I am going out to have that dog plunging about among my feet," said Ogilvie. "But I have something else for you to do. You know Colonel Ross of Duntormie."

"I have heard of him."

"His wife is an awfully nice woman, and would like to meet you. I fancy they think of buying some property—I am not sure it isn't an island—in your part of the country; and she has never been to the Highlands at all. I was to take you down with me to lunch with her at two, if you care to go. There is her card."

Macleod looked at the card.

"How far is Prince's Gate from here?" he asked.

"A mile and a half, I should say."

"And it is now twenty minutes to two," said he, rising. "It will be a nice smart walk."

"Thank you," said Mr. Ogilvie; "if it is all the same to you, we will perform the journey in a hansom. I am not in training just at present for your tramps to Ber-an-Sloich."

"Ah! your boots are rather tight," said Macleod, with grave sympathy.

They got into a hansom, and went spinning along through the crowd of carriages on this brilliant morning. The busy streets, the handsome women, the fine buildings, the bright and beautiful foliage of the parks—all these were a perpetual wonder and delight to the new-comer, who was as eager in the enjoyment of this gay world of pleasure and activity as any girl come up for her first season. Perhaps this notion occurred to the astute and experienced Lieutenant Ogilvie, who considered it his duty to warn his youthful and ingenuous friend.

"Mrs. Ross is a very handsome woman," he remarked.

"Indeed."

"And uncommonly fascinating, too, when she likes."

"Really."

"You had better look out, if she tries to fascinate you."

"She is a married woman," said Macleod.

"They are always the worst," said this wise person; "for they are jealous of the younger women."

"Oh, that is all nonsense," said Macleod, bluntly. "I am not such a greenhorn. I have read all that kind of talk in books and magazines: it is ridiculous. Do you think I will believe that married women have so little self-respect as to make themselves the laughing stock of men?"

"My dear fellow, they have cart-loads of self-respect. What I mean is, that Mrs. Ross is a bit of a lion-hunter, and she may take a fancy to make a lion of you—"

"That is better than to make an ass of me, as you suggested."

"—And naturally she will try to attach you to her set. I don't think you are quite *outré* enough for her; perhaps I made a mistake in putting you into decent clothes. You wouldn't have time to get into your kilts now? But you must be prepared to meet all sorts of queer folks at her house, especially if you stay on a bit and have some tea—mysterious poets that nobody ever heard of, and artists who won't exhibit, and awful swells from the German universities, and I don't know what besides—everybody who isn't the least like anybody else."

"And what is your claim, then, to go there?" Macleod asked.

"Oh," said the young lieutenant, laughing at the home-thrust, "I am only admitted on sufferance, as a friend of Colonel Ross. She never asked *me* to put my name in her autograph-book. But I have done a bit of the jackal for her once

or twice, when I happened to be on leave ; and she has sent me with people to her box at Covent Garden when she couldn't go herself."

"And how am I to propitiate her? What am I to do?"

"She will soon let you know how you strike her. Either she will pet you, or she will snuff you out like winking. I don't know a woman who has a blanker stare, when she likes."

This idle conversation was suddenly interrupted. At the same moment both young men experienced a sinking sensation, as if the earth had been cut away from beneath their feet ; then there was a crash, and they were violently thrown against each other ; then they vaguely knew that the cab, heeling over, was being jolted along the street by a runaway horse. Fortunately, the horse could not run very fast, for the axle-tree, deprived of its wheel, was tearing at the road ; but, all the same, the occupants of the cab though they might as well get out, and so they tried to force open the two small panels of the door in front of them. But the concussion had so jammed these together that, shove at them as they might, they would not yield. At this juncture, Macleod, who was not accustomed to hansom cabs, and did not at all like this first experience of them, determined to get out somehow : and so he raised himself a bit, so as to get his back firm against the back of the vehicle ; he pulled up his leg until his knee almost touched his mouth ; he got the heel of his boot firmly fixed on the top edge of the door : and then with one forward drive he tore the panel right away from its hinges. The other was of course flung open at once. Then he grasped the brass rail outside, steadied himself for a moment, and jumped clear from the cab, lighting on the pavement. Strange to say, Ogilvie did not follow, though Macleod, as he rushed along to try to get hold of the horse, momentarily expected to see him jump out. His anxiety was of short duration. The axle-tree caught on the curb ; there was a sudden lurch ; and then, with a crash of glass, the cab went right over, throwing down the horse, and pitching the driver into the street. It was all the work of a few seconds ; and another second seemed to suffice to collect a crowd, even in this quiet part of Kensington Gore. But, after all, very little damage was done, except to the horse, which had cut one of its hocks. When young Mr. Ogilvie scrambled out and got on to the pavement, instead of being grateful that his life had been spared, he was in a towering passion—with whom or what he knew not.

"Why didn't you jump out?" said Macleod to him, after seeing that the cabman was all right.

Ogilvie did not answer; he was looking at his besmeared hands and dishevelled clothes.

"Confound it!" said he; "what's to be done now? The house is just round the corner."

"Let us go in, and they will lend you a clothesbrush."

"As if I had been fighting a bargee? No, thank you. I will go along till I find some tavern, and get myself put to rights."

And this he did gloomily, Macleod accompanying him. It was about a quarter of an hour before he had completed his toilet; and then they set out to walk back to Prince's Gate. Mr. Ogilvie was in a better humor.

"What a fellow you are to jump, Macleod!" said he. "If you had cannoned against that policeman you would have killed him. And you never paid the cabman for destroying the lid of the door; you prized the thing clean off its hinges. You must have the strength of a giant."

"But where the people came from—it was that surprised me," said Macleod, who seemed to have rather enjoyed the adventure. "It was like one of our sea-lochs in the Highlands—you look all round and cannot find any gull anywhere but throw a biscuit into the water, and you will find then appearing from all quarters at once. As for the door, I forgot that; but I gave the man half a sovereign to console him for his shaking. Was not that enough?"

"We shall be frightfully late for luncheon," said Mr. Ogilvie, with some concern.

CHAPTER III.

FIONAGHAL.

AND, indeed, when they entered the house—the balconies and windows were a blaze of flowers all shining in the sun—they found that their host and hostess had already come downstairs, and were seated at table with their small party of guests. This circumstance did not lessen Sir Keith Macleod's trepidation; for there is no denying the fact that the

young man would rather have faced an angry bull on a Highland road than this party of people in the hushed and semi-darkened and flower-scented room. It seemed to him that his appearance was the signal for a confusion that was equivalent to an earthquake. Two or three servants—all more solemn than any clergyman—began to make new arrangements; a tall lady, benign of aspect, rose and most graciously received him; a tall gentleman, with a gray mustache, shook hands with him; and then, as he vaguely heard young Ogilvie, at the other end of the room, relate the incident of the upsetting of the cab, he found himself seated next to this benign lady, and apparently in a bewildering paradise of beautiful lights and colors and delicious odors. Asparagus soup? Yes, he would take that; but for a second or two this spacious and darkened room, with its stained glass and its sombre walls, and the table before him, with its masses of roses and lilies-of-the-valley, its silver, its crystal, its nectarines, and cherries, and pineapples, seemed some kind of enchanted place. And then the people talked in a low and hushed fashion, and the servants moved silently and mysteriously, and the air was languid with the scents of fruits and flowers. They gave him some wine in a tall green glass that had transparent lizards crawling up its stem; he had never drunk out of a thing like that before.

"It was very kind of Mr. Ogilvie to get you to come; he is a very good boy; he forgets nothing," said Mrs. Ross to him; and as he became aware that she was a pleasant-looking lady of middle age, who regarded him with very friendly and truthful eyes, he vowed to himself that he would bring Mr. Ogilvie to task for representing this decent and respectable woman as a graceless and dangerous coquette. No doubt she was the mother of children. At her time of life she was better employed in the nursery or in the kitchen than in flirting with young men; and could he doubt that she was a good house-mistress when he saw with his own eyes how spick and span everything was, and how accurately everything was served? Even if his cousin Janet lived in the south, with all these fine flowers and hot-house fruits to serve her purpose, she could not have done better. He began to like this pleasant-eyed woman, though she seemed delicate, and a trifle languid, and in consequence he sometimes could not quite make out what she said. But then he noticed that the other people talked in this limp fashion too: there was no precision about their words; frequently they seemed to leave you to

guess the end of their sentences. As for the young lady next him, was she not very delicate also? He had never seen such hands—so small, and fine, and white. And although she talked only to her neighbor on the other side of her, he could hear that her voice, low and musical as it was, was only a murmur.

“Miss White and I,” said Mrs. Ross to him—and at this moment the young lady turned to them—“were talking before you came in of the beautiful country you must know so well, and of its romantic stories and associations with Prince Charlie. Gertrude, let me introduce Sir Keith Macleod to you. I told Miss White you might come to us to-day; and she was saying what a pity it was that Flora Macdonald was not a Macleod.”

“That was very kind” said he, frankly, turning to this tall, pale girl, with the rippling hair of golden brown and the heavy-lidded and downcast eyes. And then he laughed. “We would not like to steal the honor from a woman, even though she was a Macdonald, and you know the Macdonalds and the Macleods were not very friendly in the old time. But we can claim something too about the escape of Prince Charlie, Mrs. Ross. After Flora Macdonald had got him safe from Harris to Skye, she handed him over to the sons of Macleod of Raasay, and it was owing to them that he got to the mainland. You will find many people up there to this day who believe that if Macleod of Macleod had gone out in '45, Prince Charlie would never have had to flee at all. But I think the Macleods had done enough for the Stuarts; and it was but little thanks they ever got in return, so far as I could ever hear. Do you know, Mrs. Ross, my mother wears mourning every 3d of September, and will eat nothing from morning till night. It is the anniversary of the battle of Worcester; and then the Macleods were so smashed up that for a long time the other clans relieved them from military service.”

“You are not much of a Jacobite, Sir Keith,” said Mrs. Ross, smiling.

“Only when I hear a Jacobite song sung,” said he. “Then who can fail to be a Jacobite?”

He had become quite friendly with this amiable lady. If he had been afraid that his voice, in these delicate southern ears, must sound like the first guttural drone of Donald's pipes at Castle Dare, he had speedily lost that fear. The manly, sun-browned face and clear-glancing eyes were full of

animation ; he was oppressed no longer by the solemnity of the servants ; so long as he talked to her he was quite confident ; he had made friends with this friendly woman. But he had not as yet dared to address the pale girl who sat on his right, and who seemed so fragile and beautiful and distant in manner.

"After all," said he to Mrs. Ross, "there were no more Highlanders killed in the cause of the Stuarts than used to be killed every year or two merely out of the quarrels of the clans among themselves. All about where I live there is scarcely a rock, or a loch, or an island that has not its story. And I think," added he, with a becoming modesty, "that the Macleods were by far the most treacherous and savage and bloodthirsty of the whole lot of them."

And now the fair stranger beside him addressed him for the first time ; and as she did so, she turned her eyes towards him—clear, large eyes that rather startled one when the heavy lids were lifted, so full of expression were they.

"I suppose," said she, with a certain demure smile, "you have no wild deeds done there now ?"

"Oh, we have become quite peaceable folks now," said he, laughing. "Our spirit is quite broken. The wild boars are all away from the islands now, even from Muick ; we have only the sheep. And the Mackenzies, and the Macleans, and the Macleods—they are all sheep now."

Was it not quite obvious ? How could any one associate with this bright-faced young man the fierce traditions of hate and malice and revenge, that makes the seas and islands of the north still more terrible in their loneliness ? Those were the days of strong wills and strong passions, and of an easy disregard of individual life when the gratification of some set desire was near. What had this Macleod to do with such scorching fires of hate and of love ? He was playing with a silver fork and half a dozen strawberries : Miss White's surmise was perfectly natural and correct.

The ladies went upstairs, and the men, after the claret had gone round, followed them. And now it seemed to this rude Highlander that he was only going from wonder to wonder. Half-way up the narrow staircase was a large recess dimly lit by the sunlight falling through stained glass, and there was a small fountain playing in the middle of this grotto and all around was a wilderness of ferns dripping with the spray, while at the entrance two stone figures held up magical globes on which the springing and falling water was reflected.

Then from this partial gloom he emerged into the drawing-room—a dream of rose-pink and gold, with the air sweetened around him by the masses of roses and tall lilies about. His eyes were rather bewildered at first; the figures of the women seemed dark against the white lace of the windows. But as he went forward to his hostess, he could make out still further wonders of color; for in the balconies outside, in the full glare of the sun, were geraniums, and lobelias, and golden calceolarias, and red snapdragon, their bright hues faintly tempered by the thin curtains through which they were seen. He could not help expressing his admiration of these things that were so new to him, for it seemed to him that he had come into a land of perpetual summer and sunshine and glowing flowers. Then the luxuriant greenness of the foliage on the other side of Exhibition Road—for Mrs. Ross's house faced westward—was, as he said, singularly beautiful to one accustomed to the windy skies of the western isles.

“But you have not seen our elm—our own elm,” said Mrs. Ross, who was arranging some azaleas that had just been sent her. “We are very proud of our elm. Gertrude, will you take Sir Keith to see our noble elm?”

He had almost forgotten who Gertrude was; but the next second he recognized the low and almost timid voice that said.

“Will you come this way, then Sir Keith?”

He turned, and found that it was Miss White who spoke. How was it that this girl, who was only a girl, seemed to do things so easily, and gently, and naturally, without any trace of embarrassment or self-consciousness? He followed her, and knew not which to admire the more, the careless simplicity of her manner, or the singular symmetry of her tall and slender figure. He had never seen any statue or any picture in any book to be compared with this woman, who was so fine, and rare, and delicate that she seemed only a beautiful tall flower in this garden of flowers. There was a strange simplicity, too, about her dress—a plain, tight-fitting, tight-sleeved dress of unrelieved black, her only adornment being some bands of big blue beads worn loosely round the neck. The black figure, in this shimmer of rose-pink and gold and flowers, was effective enough; but even the finest of pictures or the finest of statues has not the subtle attraction of a graceful carriage. Macleod had never seen any woman walk as this woman walked, in so stately and yet so simple a way.

From Mrs. Ross's chief drawing-room they passed into an

antedrawing-room, which was partly a passage and partly a conservatory. On the window side were some rows of Cape heaths, on the wall side some rows of blue and white plates; and it was one of the latter that was engaging the attention of two persons in this anteroom—Colonel Ross himself, and a little old gentleman in gold-rimmed spectacles.

“Shall I introduce you to my father?” said Miss White to her companion; and, after a word or two, they passed on.

“I think papa is invaluable to Colonel Ross,” said she: “he is as good as an auctioneer at telling the value of china. Look at this beautiful heath. Mrs. Ross is very proud of her heaths.”

The small white fingers scarcely touched the beautiful blossoms of the plant; but which were the more palely roseate and waxen? If one were to grasp that hand—in some sudden moment of entreaty, in the sharp joy of reconciliation, in the agony of farewell—would it not be crushed like a frail flower?

“There is our elm,” said she, lightly. “Mrs. Ross and I regard it as our own, we have sketched it so often.”

They had emerged from the conservatory into a small square room, which was practically a continuation of the drawing-room, but which was decorated in pale blue and silver, and filled with a lot of knick-knacks that showed it was doubtless Mrs. Ross’s boudoir. And out there, in the clear June sunshine, lay the broad greensward behind Prince’s Gate, with the one splendid elm spreading his broad branches into the blue sky, and throwing a soft shadow on the corner of the gardens next to the house. How sweet and still it was!—as still as the calm, clear light in this girl’s eyes. There was no passion there, and no trouble; only the light of a June day, and of blue skies, and a peaceful soul. She rested the tips of her fingers on a small rosewood table that stood by the window: surely, if a spirit ever lived in any table, the wood of this table must have thrilled to its core.

And had he given all this trouble to this perfect creature merely that he should look at a tree? and was he to say some ordinary thing about an ordinary elm to tell her how grateful he was?

“It is like a dream to me,” he said, honestly enough, “since I came to London. You seem always to have sunlight and plenty of fine trees and hot-house flowers. But I suppose you have winter, like the rest of us?”

“Or we should very soon tire of all this, beautiful as it

is," said she ; and she looked rather wistfully out on the broad, still gardens. " For my part, I should very soon tire of it. I should think there was more excitement in the wild storms and the dark nights of the north ; there must be a strange fascination in the short winter days among the mountains, and the long winter nights by the side of the Atlantic."

He looked at her and smiled. That fierce fascination he knew something of : how had she guessed at it ? And as for her talking as if she herself would gladly brave these storms—was it for a foam-bell to brave a storm ? was it for a rose-leaf to meet the driving rains of Ben-an-Sloich ?

" Shall we go back now ? " said she ; and as she turned to lead the way he could not fail to remark how shapely her neck was, for her rich golden-brown hair was loosely gathered up behind.

But just at this moment Mrs. Ross made her appearance.

" Come," said she, " we shall have a chat all to ourselves ; and you will tell me, Sir Keith, what you have seen since you came to London, and what has struck you most. And you must stay with us, Gertrude. Perhaps Sir Keith will be so kind as to freeze your blood with another horrible story about the Highlanders. I am only a poor southerner, and had to get up my legends from books. But this wicked girl, Sir Keith, delights as much in stories of bloodshed as a schoolboy does."

" You will not believe her," said Miss White, in that low-toned, gravely sincere voice of hers, while a faint shell-like pink suffused her face. " It was only that we were talking of the highlands, because we understood you were coming ; and Mrs. Ross was trying to make out"—and here a spice of proud mischief came into her ordinarily calm eyes—" she was trying to make out that you must be a very terrible and dangerous person, who would probably murder us all if we were not civil to you

" Well, you know, Sir Keith," said Mrs. Ross, apologetically, " you acknowledge yourself that you Macleods were a very dreadful lot of people at one time. What a shame it was to track the poor fellow over the snow, and then deliberately to put brushwood in front of the cave, and then suffocate whole two hundred persons at once ! "

" Oh yes, no doubt ! " said he ; " but the Macdonalds were asked first to give up the men that had bound the Macleods hand and foot and set them adrift in the boat, and they would not do it. And if the Macdonalds had got the Mac-

leods into a cave, they would have suffocated them too. The Macdonalds began it."

"Oh, no, no, no," protested Mrs. Ross; "I can remember better than that. What were the Macleods about on the island at all when they had to be sent off, tied hand and foot, in their boats?"

"And what is the difference between tying a man hand and foot and putting him out in the Atlantic, and suffocating him in a cave? It was only by an accident that the wind drifted them over to Skye."

"I shall begin to fear that you have some of the old blood in you," said Mrs. Ross, with a smile, "if you try to excuse one of the cruelest things ever heard of."

"I do not excuse it at all," said he, simply. "It was very bad—very cruel. But perhaps the Macleods were not so much worse than others. It was not a Macleod at all, it was a Gordon—and she a woman, too—that killed the chief of the Mackintoshes after she had received him as a friend. 'Put your head down on the table,' said she to the chief, 'in token of your submission to the Earl of Huntly.' And no sooner had he bowed his neck than she whipped out a knife and cut his head off. That was a Gordon, not a Macleod. And I do not think the Macleods were so much worse than their neighbors, after all."

"Oh, how can you say that?" exclaimed his persecutor. "Who was ever guilty of such an act of treachery as setting fire to the barn at Dunvegan? Macdonald and his men get driven on to Skye by the bad weather; they beg for shelter from their old enemy; Macleod professes to be very great friends with them; and Macdonald is to sleep in the castle, while his men have a barn prepared for them. You know very well, Sir Keith, that if Macdonald had remained that night in Dunvegan Castle he would have been murdered; and if the Macleod girl had not given a word of warning to her sweetheart, the men in the barn would have been burned to death. I think if I were a Macdonald I should be proud of that scene—the Macdonalds marching down to their boats with their pipes playing, while the barn was all in a blaze fired by their treacherous enemies. Oh, Sir Keith, I hope there are no Macleods of that sort alive now."

"There are not, Mrs. Ross," said he, gravely. "They were all killed by the Macdonalds, I suppose."

"I do believe," said she, "that it was a Macleod who

built a stone tower on a lonely island, and imprisoned his wife there—”

“Miss White,” the young man said, modestly, “will not you help me? Am I to be made responsible for all the evil doings of my ancestors?”

“It is really not fair, Mrs. Ross,” said she; and the sound of this voice pleading for him went to his heart: it was not as the voice of other women.

“I only meant to punish you,” said Mrs. Ross, “for having traversed the indictment—I don’t know whether that is the proper phrase, or what it means, but it sounds well. You first acknowledge that the Macleods were by far the most savage of the people living up there: and then you tried to make out that the poor creatures whom they harried were as cruel as themselves.”

“What is cruel now was not cruel then,” he said; “it was a way of fighting: it was what is called an ambush now—enticing your enemy, and then taking him at a disadvantage. And if you did not do that to him, he would do it to you. And when a man is mad with anger or revenge, what does he care for anything?”

“I thought we were all sheep now,” said she.

“Do you know the story of the man who was flogged by Maclean of Lochbuy—that is in Mull,” said he, not heeding her remark. “You do not know that old story?”

They did not; and he proceeded to tell it in a grave and simple fashion which was sufficiently impressive. For he was talking to these two friends now in the most unembarrassed way; and he had, besides, the chief gift of a born narrator—an utter forgetfulness of himself. His eyes rested quite naturally on their eyes as he told his tale. But first of all, he spoke of the exceeding loyalty of the Highland folk to the head of their clan. Did they know that other story of how Maclean of Duart tried to capture the young heir of the house of Lochbuy, and how the boy was rescued and carried away by his nurse? And when, arrived at man’s estate, he returned to revenge himself on those who had betrayed him, among them was the husband of the nurse. The young chief would have spared the life of this man, for the old woman’s sake. “*Let the tail go with the hide,*” said she, and he was slain with the rest. And then the narrator went on to the story of the flogging. He told them how Maclean of Lochbuy was out after the deer one day; and his wife, with her child, had come out to see the shooting. They

were driving the deer; and at a particular pass a man was stationed so that, should the deer come that way, he should turn them back. The deer came to this pass; the man failed to turn them; and the chief was mad with rage. He gave orders that the man's back should be bared, and that he should be flogged before all the people.

"Very well," continued Macleod. "It was done. But it is not safe to do anything like that to a Highlander; at least it *was* not safe to do anything like that to a highlander in those days; for, as I told you, Mrs. Ross, we are all like sheep now. Then they went after the deer again; but at one moment the man that had been flogged seized Maclean's child from the nurse, and ran with it across the mountain-side, till he reached a place overhanging the sea. And he held out the child over the sea; and it was no use that Maclean begged on his knees for forgiveness. Even the passion of loyalty was lost now in the fierceness of his revenge. This was what the man said—that unless Maclean had his back bared there and then before all the people, and flogged as he had been flogged, then the child should be dashed into the sea below. There was nothing to be done but that—no prayers, no offers, no appeals from the mother, were of any use. And so it was that Maclean of Lochbuy was flogged there before his own people, and his enemy above looking on. And then? When it was over, the man called aloud, 'Revenged! revenged!' and sprang into the air with the child along with him; and neither of them was ever seen again after they had sunk into the sea. It is an old story."

An old story, doubtless, and often told; but its effect on this girl sitting beside him was strange. Her clasped hands trembled; her eyes were glazed and fascinated as if by some spell. Mrs. Ross, noticing this extreme tension of feeling, and fearing it, hastily rose.

"Come, Gertrude," she said, taking the girl by the hand, "we shall be frightened to death by these stories. Come and sing us a song—a French song, all about tears, and fountains, and bits of ribbon—or we shall be seeing the ghosts of murdered Highlanders coming in here in the day-time."

Macleod, not knowing what he had done, but conscious that something had occurred, followed then into the drawing-room, and retired to a sofa, while Miss White sat down to the open piano. He hoped he had not offended her. He

would not frighten her again with any ghastly stories from the wild northern seas.

And what was this French song that she was about to sing? The pale, slender fingers were wandering over the keys; and there was a sound—faint and clear and musical—as of the rippling of summer seas. And sometimes the sounds came nearer; and now he fancied he recognized some old familiar strain; and he thought of his cousin Janet somehow, and of summer days down by the blue waters of the Atlantic. A French song? Surely if this air, that seemed to come nearer and nearer, was blown from any earthly land, it had come from the valleys of Lochiel and Ardgour, and from the still shores of Arisaig and Moidart? Oh yes; it was a very pretty French song that she had chosen to please Mrs. Ross with.

“A wee bird cam’ to our ha’ door”—

this was what she sang; and though, to tell the truth, she had not much of a voice, it was exquisitely trained, and she sang with a tenderness and expression such as he, at least, had never heard before,—

“He warbled sweet and clearly;
An’aye the o’ercome o’ his sang
Was ‘Wae’s me for Prince Charlie!’
Oh, when I heard the bonnie bonnie bird!
The tears cam’ drappin’ rarely;
I took my bonnet off my head,
For well I lo’ed Prince Charlie.”

It could not have entered into his imagination to believe that such pathos could exist apart from the actual sorrow of the world. The instrument before her seemed to speak; and the low, joint cry was one of infinite grief, and longing, and love.

“Quoth I, ‘My bird, my bonnie, bonnie bird,
Is that a sang ye borrow?
Are these some words ye’ve learnt by heart,
Or a lilt o’ dool an’ sorrow?
‘Oh, no, no, no,’ the wee bird sang;
‘I’ve flown sin’ mornin’ early;
But sic a day o’ wind an’ rain—
Oh, wae’s me for Prince Charlie!’”

Mrs. Ross glanced archly at him when she discovered what

sort of French song it was that Miss White had chosen ; but he paid no heed. His only thought was, "*If only the mother and Janet could hear this strange singing!*"

When she had ended, Mrs. Ross came over to him and said, "That is a great compliment to you."

And he answered, simply, "I have never heard any singing like that."

Then young Mr. Ogilvie—whose existence, by-the-way, he had entirely and most ungratefully forgotten—came up to the piano, and began to talk in a very pleasant and amusing fashion to Miss White. She was turning over the leaves of the book before her, and Macleod grew angry with this idle interference. Why should this lily-fingered jackanapes, whom a man could wind round a reel and throw out of window, disturb the rapt devotion of this beautiful Saint Cecilia?

She struck a firmer chord ; the bystanders withdrew a bit ; and of a sudden it seemed to him that all the spirit of all the clans was ringing in the proud fervor of this fragile girl's voice. Whence had she got this fierce Jacobite passion that thrilled him to the very finger-tips?

"I'll to Lochiel, and Appin, and kneel to them,
Down by Lord Murray and Roy of Kildarlie :
Brave Mackintosh, he shall fly to the field with them ;
These are the lads I can trust wi' my Charlie !"

Could any man fail to answer? Could any man die otherwise than gladly if he died with such an appeal ringing in his ears? Macleod did not know there was scarcely any more volume in this girl's voice now than when she was singing the plaintive wail that preceded it : it seemed to him that there was the strength of the tread of armies in it, and a challenge that could rouse a nation.

"Down through the Lowlands, down wi' the Whigamore,
Loyal true Highlanders, down wi' them rarely !
Ronald and Donald, drive on wi' the broad claymore
Over the neck o' the foes o' Prince Charlie !
Follow thee ! follow thee ! wha wadna follow thee,
King o' the Highland hearts, bonnie Prince Charlie !"

She shut the book, with a light laugh, and left the piano. She came over to where Macleod sat. When he saw that she meant to speak to him, he rose and stood before her.

"I must ask your pardon," said she, smiling, "for singing two Scotch songs, for I know the pronunciation is very difficult."

He answered with no idle compliment.

"If *Tearlach ban og*, as they used to call him, were alive now," said he—and indeed there was never any Stuart of them all, not even the Fair Young Charles himself, who looked more handsome than this same Macleod of Dare who now stood before her—"you would get him more men to follow him than any flag or standard he ever raised."

She cast her eyes down.

Mrs. Ross's guests began to leave.

"Gertrude," said she, "will you drive with me for half an hour—the carriage is at the door? And I know the gentlemen want to have a cigar in the shade of Kensington Gardens: they might come back and have a cup of tea with us."

But Miss White had some engagement; she and her father left together; and the young men followed them almost directly, Mrs. Ross saying that she would be most pleased to see Sir Keith Macleod any Tuesday or Thursday afternoon he happened to be passing, as she was always at home on these days.

"I don't think we can do better than take her advice about the cigar," said young Ogilvie, as they crossed to Kensington Gardens. "What do you think of her?"

"Of Mrs. Ross?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I think she is a very pleasant woman."

"Yes, but," said Mr. Ogilvie, "how did she strike you? Do you think she is as fascinating as some men think her?"

"I don't know what men think about her," said Macleod. "It never occurred to me to ask whether a married woman was fascinating or not. I thought she was a friendly woman—talkative, amusing, clever enough."

They lit their cigars in the cool shadow of the great elms: who does not know how beautiful Kensington Gardens are in June? And yet Macleod did not seem disposed to be garrulous about these new experiences of his; he was absorbed, and mostly silent.

"That is an extraordinary fancy she has taken for Gertrude White," Mr. Ogilvie remarked.

"Why extraordinary?" the other asked, with sudden interest.

"Oh, well, it is unusual, you know. But she is a nice girl enough, and Mrs. Ross is fond of odd folks. You didn't speak to old White?—his head is a sort of British Museum of antiquities; but he is of some use to these people—he is

such a swell about old armor, and china, and such things. They say he wants to be sent out to dig for Dido's funeral pyre at Carthage, and that he is only waiting to get the trinkets made at Birmingham."

They walked on a bit in silence.

"I think you made a good impression on Mrs. Ross," said Ogilvie, coolly. "You'll find her an uncommonly useful woman, if she takes a fancy to you ; for she knows everybody and goes everywhere, though her own house is too small to entertain properly. By-the-way, Macleod, I don't think you could have hit on a worse fellow than I to take you about, for I am so little in London that I have become a rank outsider. But I'll tell you what I'll do for you if you will go with me to-night to Lord Beauregard's who is an old friend of mine. I will ask him to introduce you to some people—and his wife gives very good dances—and if any royal or imperial swell comes to town, you'll be sure to run against him there. I forget who it is they are receiving there to-night ; but anyhow you'll meet two or three of the fat duchesses whom Dizzy adores ; and I shouldn't wonder if that Irish girl were there—the new beauty : Lady Beauregard is very clever at picking people up."

"Will Miss White be there ?" Macleod asked, apparently deeply engaged in probing the end of his cigar.

His companion looked up in surprise. Then a new fancy seemed to occur to him, and he smiled very slightly.

"Well, no," said he, slowly, "I don't think she will. In fact, I am almost sure she will be at the Piccadilly Theatre. If you like, we will give up Lady Beauregard, and after dinner go to the Piccadilly Theatre instead. How will that do ?"

"I think that will do very well," said Macleod.

CHAPTER IV

WONDER-LAND.

A COOL evening in June, the club windows open, a clear twilight shining over Pall Mall, and a *tete-a-tete* dinner at a small, clean, bright table—these are not the conditions in

which a young man should show impatience. And yet the cunning dishes which Mr. Ogilvie, who had a certain pride in his club, though it was only one of the junior institutions, had placed before his friend, met with but scanty curiosity: Macleod would rather have handed questions of cookery over to his cousin Janet. Nor did he pay much heed to his companion's sage advice as to the sort of club he should have himself proposed at, with a view to getting elected in a dozen or fifteen years. A young man is apt to let his life at forty shift for itself.

"You seem very anxious to see Miss White again," said Mr. Ogilvie, with a slight smile.

"I wish to make all the friends I can while I am in London," said Macleod. "What shall I do in this howling wilderness when you go back to Aldershot?"

"I don't think Miss Gertrude White will be of much use to you. Colonel Ross may be. Or Lord Beauregard. But you cannot expect young ladies to take you about."

"No?" said Macleod, gravely; "that is a great pity."

Mr. Ogilvie, who, with all his knowledge of the world, and of wines and cookery, and women, and what not, had sometimes an uneasy consciousness that his companion was laughing at him, here proposed that they should have a cigar before walking up to the Piccadilly Theatre; but as it was now ten minutes to eight, Macleod resolutely refused. He begged to be considered a country person, anxious to see the piece from the beginning. And so they put on their light top-coats over their evening dress and walked up to the theatre.

A distant sound of music, an odor of escaped gas, a perilous descent of a corkscrew staircase, a drawing aside of heavy curtains, and then a blaze of yellow light shining within this circular building, on its red satin and gilt plaster, and on the spacious picture of a blue Italian lake, with peacocks on the wide stone terraces. The noise at first was bewildering. The leader of the orchestra was sawing away at his violin as savagely as if he were calling on his company to rush up and seize a battery of guns. What was the melody that was being banged about by the trombones, and blared aloud by the shrill cornets, and sawed across by the infuriated violins? "When the heart of a man is oppressed with care." The cure was never insisted on with such an angry vehemence.

Recovering from the first shock of this fierce noise, Mac-

leod began to look around this strange place, with its magical colors and its profusion of gilding; but nowhere in the half-empty stalls or behind the lace curtains of the boxes could he make out the visitor of whom he was in search. Perhaps she was not coming, then? Had he sacrificed the evening all for nothing? As regarded the theatre or the piece to be played, he had not the slightest interest in either. The building was very pretty, no doubt; but it was only, in effect, a superior sort of booth; and as for the trivial amusement of watching a number of people strut across a stage and declaim—or perhaps make fools of themselves to raise a laugh—that was not at all to his liking. It would have been different had he been able to talk to the girl who had shown such a strange interest in the gloomy stories of the Northern seas; perhaps, though he would scarcely have admitted this to himself, it might have been different if only he had been allowed to see her at some distance. But her being absent altogether? The more the seats in the stalls were filled—reducing the chances of her coming—the more empty the theatre seemed to become.

“At least we can go along to that house you mentioned,” said he to his companion.

“Oh, don’t be disappointed yet,” said Ogilvie; “I know she will be here.”

“With Mrs. Ross?”

“Mrs. Ross comes very often to this theatre. It is the correct thing to do. It is high art. All the people are raving about the chief actress; artists painting her portrait; poets writing sonnets about her different characters—no end of a fuss. And Mrs. Ross is very proud that so distinguished a person is her particular friend.”

“Do you mean the actress?”

“Yes; and makes her the big feature of her parties at present; and society is rather inclined to make a pet of her, too—patronizing high art, don’t you know. It’s wonderful what you can do in that way. If a duke wants a clown to make fellows laugh after a Derby dinner, he gets him to his house and makes him dance; and if the papers find it out, it is only raising the moral status of the pantomime. Of course it is different with Mrs. Ross’s friend: she is all right socially.”

The garrulous boy was stopped by the sudden cessation of the music; and then the Italian lake and the peacocks disappeared into unknown regions above; and behold! in

their place a spacious hall was revealed—not the bare and simple hall at Castle Dare with which Macleod was familiar, but a grand apartment, filled with old armor, and pictures, and cabinets, and showing glimpses of a balcony and fair gardens beyond. There were two figures in this hall, and they spoke—in the high and curious falsetto of the stage. Macleod paid no more heed to them than if they had been marionettes. For one thing, he could not follow their speech very well; but, in any case, what interest could he have in listening to this old lawyer explaining to the stout lady that the family affairs were grievously involved? He was still intently watching the new-comers who straggled in, singly or in pairs, to the stalls. When a slight motion of the white curtains showed that some one was entering one of the boxes, the corner of the box was regarded with as earnest a gaze as ever followed the movements of a herd of red deer in the misty chasms of Ben-an-Sloich. What concern had he in the troubles of this over-dressed and stout lady, who was bewailing her misfortunes and wringing her bejewelled hands?

Suddenly his heart seemed to stand still altogether. It was a light, glad laugh—the sound of a voice he knew—that seemed to have pierced him as with a rifle-ball; and at the same moment from the green shimmer of foliage in the balcony there stepped into the glare of the hall a young girl with life, and laughter, and a merry carelessness in her face and eyes. She threw her arms around her mother's neck and kissed her. She bowed to the legal person. She flung her garden hat on to a couch, and got up on a chair to get fresh seed put in for her canary. It was all done so simply, and naturally, and gracefully that in an instant a fire of life and reality sprang into the whole of this sham thing. The woman was no longer a marionette, but the anguish-stricken mother of this gay and heedless girl. And when the daughter jumped down from the chair again—her canary on her finger—and when she came forward to pet, and caress, and remonstrate with her mother, and when the glare of the lights flashed on the merry eyes, and on the white teeth and laughing lips, there was no longer any doubt possible. Macleod's face was quite pale. He took the programme from Ogilvie's hand, and for a minute or two stared mechanically at the name of Miss Gertrude White, printed on the pink-tinted paper. He gave it him back without a word. Ogilvie only smiled; he was proud of the surprise he had planned.

And now the fancies and recollections that came rush-

ing into Macleod's head were of a sufficiently chaotic and bewildering character. He tried to separate that grave, and gentle, and sensitive girl he had met at Prince's Gate from this gay madcap, and he could not at all succeed. His heart laughed with the laughter of this wild creature; he enjoyed the discomfiture and despair of the old lawyer as she stood before him twirling her garden hat by a solitary ribbon; and when the small, white fingers raised the canary to be kissed by the pouting lips, the action was more graceful than anything he had ever seen in the world. But where was the silent and serious girl who had listened with such rapt attention to his tales of passion and revenge, who seemed to have some mysterious longing for those gloomy shores he came from, who had sung with such exquisite pathos "A wee bird cam' to our ha' door?" Her cheek had turned white when she heard of the fate of the son of Maclean: surely that sensitive and vivid imagination could not belong to this audacious girl, with her laughing, and teasings, and demure coquetry?

Society had not been talking about the art of Mrs. Ross's *protegee* for nothing; and that art soon made short work of Keith Macleod's doubts. The fair stranger he had met at Prince's Gate vanished into mist. Here was the real woman; and all the trumpery buisness of the theatre, that he would otherwise have regarded with indifference or contempt, became a real and living thing, insomuch that he followed the fortunes of this spoiled child with a breathless interest and a beating heart. The spell was on him. Oh, why should she be so proud to this poor lover, who stood so meekly before her? "Coquette, coquette" (Macleod could have cried to her), "the days are not always full of sunshine; life is not all youth, and beauty, and high spirits; you may come to repent of your pride and your cruelty." He had no jealousy against the poor youth who took his leave; he pitied him, but it was for her sake; he seemed to know that evil days were coming, when she would long for the solace of an honest man's love. And when the trouble came—as it speedily did—and when she stood bravely up at first to meet her fate, and when she broke down for a time, and buried her face in her hands, and cried with bitter sobs, the tears were running down his face. Could the merciful heavens see such grief, and let the wicked triumph? And why was there no man to succor her? Surely some times arise in which the old law is the good law, and a man will trust to his own right

arm to put things straight in the world? To look at her!—could any man refuse? And now she rises and goes away, and all the glad summer-time and the sunshine have gone, and the cold wind shivers through the trees, and it breathes only of farewell. Farewell, O miserable one! the way is dark before you, and you are alone. Alone, and no man near to help.

Macleod was awakened from his trance. The act drop was let down; there was a stir throughout the theatre; young Ogilvie turned to him,—

“Don’t you see who has come into that corner box up there?”

If he had told that Miss White, just come up from Prince’s Gate, in her plain black dress and blue beads, had just arrived and was seated there, he would scarcely have been surprised. As it was, he looked up and saw Colonel Ross taking his seat, while the figure of a lady was partially visible behind the lace curtain.

“I wonder how often Mrs. Ross has seen this piece?” Ogilvie said. “And I think Colonel Ross is as profound a believer in Miss White as his wife is. Will you go up and see them now?”

“No,” Macleod said, absently.

“I shall tell them,” said the facetious boy as he rose and got hold of his crush hat, “that you are meditating a leap on to the stage to rescue the distressed damsel.”

And then his conscience smote him.

“Mind you,” said he, “I think it is awfully good myself. I can’t pump up any enthusiasm for most things that people rave about, but I do think this girl is uncommonly clever. And then she always dresses like a lady.”

With this high commendation, Lieutenant Ogilvie left, and made his way upstairs to Mrs. Ross’s box. Apparently he was well received there, for he did not make his appearance again at the beginning of the next act, nor, indeed, until it was nearly over.

The dream-world opens again; and now it is a beautiful garden, close by the ruins of an old abbey, and fine ladies are walking about there. But what does he care for these marionettes uttering meaningless phrases? They have no more interest for him than the sham ruins, so long as that one bright, speaking, pathetic face is absent; and the story they are carrying forward is for him no story at all, for he takes no heed of its details in his anxious watching for her

appearance. The sides of this garden are mysteriously divided: by which avenue shall she approach? Suddenly he hears the low voice—she comes nearer. Now let the world laugh again! But, alas! when she does appear, it is in the company of her lover, and it is only to bid him good-by. Why does the coward hind take her at her word? A stick, a stone, a wave of the cold sea, would be more responsive to that deep and tremulous voice, which has now no longer any of the art of a wilful coquetry about it, but is altogether as self-revealing as the generous abandonment of her eyes. The poor cipher! he is not the man to woo and win and carry off this noble woman, the unutterable soul surrender of whose look has the courage of despair in it. He bids her farewell. The tailor's dummy retires. And she? in her agony, is there no one to comfort her? They have demanded his sacrifice in the name of duty, and she has consented: ought not that to be enough to comfort her? then other people appear from other parts of the garden, and there is a Babel of tongues. He hears nothing; but he follows that sad face, until he could imagine that he listened to the throbbing of her aching heart.

And then, as the phantasms of the stage come and go, and fortune plays many pranks with these puppets, the piece draws near to an end. And now as it appears, everything is reversed, and it is the poor lover who is in grievous trouble, while she is restored to the proud position of her coquetries and wilful graces again, with all her friends smiling around her, and life lying fair before her. She meets him by accident. Suffering gives him a certain sort of dignity; but how is one to retain patience with the blindness of this insufferable ass? Don't you see, man—don't you see that she is waiting to throw herself into your arms? and you, you poor ninny, are giving yourself airs, and doing the grand heroic! And then the shy coquetry comes in again. The pathetic eyes are full of a grave compassion, if he must really never see her more. The cat plays with the poor mouse, and pretends that really the tender thing is gone away at last. He will take this half of a broken sixpence back: it was given in happier times. If ever he should marry, he will know that one far away prays for his happiness. And if—if these unwomanly tears— And suddenly the crass idiot discovers that she is laughing at him, and that she has secured him and bound him as completely as a fly fifty times wound round by a spider. The crash of applause that accompanied the

lowering of the curtain stunned Macleod, who had not quite come back from dreamland. And then, amidst a confused roar, the curtain was drawn a bit back, and she was led—timidly smiling, so that her eyes seemed to take in all the theatre at once—across the stage by that same poor fool of a lover; and she had two or three bouquets thrown her, notably one from Mrs. Ross's box. Then she disappeared, and the lights were lowered, and there was a dull shuffling of people getting their cloaks and hats and going away.

"Mrs. Ross wants to see you for a minute," Ogilvie said.

"Yes," Macleod answered, absently.

"And we have time yet, if you like, to get into a hansom and drive along to Lady Beauregard's."

CHAPTER V.

IN PARK LANE.

THEY found Mrs. Ross and her husband waiting in the corridor above.

"Well, how did you like it?" she said.

He could not answer offhand. He was afraid he might say too much.

"It is like her singing," he stammered, at length. "I am not used to these things. I have never seen anything like that before."

"We shall soon have her in a better piece," Mrs. Ross said. "It is being written for her. That is very pretty, but slight. She is capable of greater things."

"She is capable of anything," said Macleod, simply, "if she can make you believe that such nonsense is real. I looked at the others. What did they say or do better than mere pictures in a book? But she—it is like magic."

"And did Mr. Ogilvie give you my message?" said Mrs. Ross. "My husband and I are going down to see a yacht race on the Thames to-morrow—we did not think of it till this evening any more than we expected to find you here. We came along to try to get Miss White to go with us. Will you join our little party?"

"Oh, yes, certainly—thank you very much," Macleod said, eagerly.

"Then you'd better meet us at Charing Cross, at ten sharp," Colonel Ross said; "so don't let Ogilvie keep you up too late with brandy and soda. A special will take us down."

"Brandy and soda!" Mr. Ogilvie exclaimed. "I am going to take him along for a few minutes to Lady Beauregard's—surely that is proper enough; and I have to get down by the 'cold-meat' train to Aldershot, so there won't be much brandy and soda for me. Shall we go now, Mrs. Ross?"

"I am waiting for an answer," Mrs. Ross said, looking along the corridor.

Was it possible, then, that she herself should bring the answer to this message that had been sent her—stepping out of the dream-world in which she had disappeared with her lover? And how would she look as she came along this narrow passage? Like the arch coquette of this land of gas-light and glowing colors? or like the pale, serious, proud girl who was fond of sketching the elm at Prince's Gate? A strange nervousness possessed him as he thought she might suddenly appear. He did not listen to the talk between Colonel Ross and Mr. Ogilvie. He did not notice that this small party was obviously regarded as being in the way by the attendants who were putting out the lights and shutting the doors of the boxes. Then a man came along.

"Miss White's compliments, ma'am, and she will be very pleased to meet you at Charing Cross at ten to-morrow."

"And Miss White is a very brave young lady to attempt anything of the kind," observed Mr. Ogilvie, confidentially, as they all went downstairs; "for if the yachts should get becalmed of the Nore, or off the Mouse, I wonder how Miss White will get back to London in time?"

"Oh, we shall take care of that," said Colonel Ross. "Unless there is a good steady breeze we sha'n't go at all; we shall spend a happy day at Rosherville, or have a look at the pictures at Greenwich. We sha'n't get Miss White into trouble. Good-bye, Ogilvie. Good-bye, Sir Keith. Remember ten o'clock, Charing Cross."

They stepped into their carriage and drove off.

"Now," said Macleod's companion, "are you tired?"

"Tired? I have done nothing all day."

"Shall we get into a hansom and drive along to Lady Beauregard's?"

"Certainly, if you like. I suppose they won't throw you over again?"

"Oh no," said Mr. Ogilvie, as he once more adventured his person in a cab. "And I can tell you it is much better—if you look at the thing philosophically, as poor wretches like you and me must—to drive to a crush in a hansom than in your own carriage. You don't worry about your horses being kept out in the rain; you can come away at any moment; there is no fussing with servants, and rows because your man has got out of the rank— **HOLD UP!**"

Whether it was the yell or not, the horse recovered from the slight stumble; and no harm befel the two daring travellers.

"These vehicles give one some excitement," Macleod said—or rather roared, for Piccadilly was full of carriages. "A squall in Loch Scridain is nothing to them."

"You'll get used to them in time," was the complacent answer.

They dismissed the hansom at the corner of Piccadilly, and walked up Park Lane, so as to avoid waiting in the rank of carriages. Macleod accompanied his companion meekly. All this scene around him—the flashing lights of the broughams, the brilliant windows, the stepping across the pavement of a strangely dressed dignitary from some foreign land—seemed but some other part of that dream from which he had not quite shaken himself free. His head was still full of the sorrows and coquetries of that wild-spirited heroine. Whither had she gone by this time—away into some strange valley of that unknown world?

He was better able than Mr. Ogilvie to push his way through the crowd of footmen who stood in two lines across the pavement in front of Beauregard House, watching for the first appearance of their master or mistress; but he resignedly followed, and found himself in the avenue leading clear up to the steps. They were not the only arrivals, late as the hour was. Two young girls, sisters, clad in cream-white silk with a gold fringe across their shoulders and sleeves, preceded them; and he was greatly pleased by the manner in which these young ladies, on meeting in the great hall an elderly lady who was presumably a person of some distinction, dropped a pretty little old-fashioned courtesy as they shook hands with her. He admired much less the more formal obeisance which he noticed a second after. A royal personage was leaving; and as this lady, who was dressed in mourning, and was leaning on the arm of a gentleman whose

coat was blazing with diamond stars, and whose breast was barred across with a broad blue ribbon, came along the spacious landing at the foot of the wide staircase, she graciously extended her hand and said a few words to such of the ladies standing by as she knew. That deep bending of the knee he considered to be less pretty than the little courtesy performed by the young ladies in cream-white silk. He intended to mention this matter to his cousin Janet.

Then, as soon as the Princess had left the lane, through which she had passed closed up again, and the crowd became a confused mass of murmuring groups. Still meekly following, Macleod plunged into this throng, and presently found himself being introduced to Lady Beauregard—an amiable little woman who had been a great beauty in her time, and was pleasant enough to look at now. He passed on.

“Who is the man with the blue ribbon and the diamond star?” he asked of Mr. Ogilvie.

“That is Monsieur le Marquis himself—that is your host,” the young gentleman replied—only Macleod could not tell why he was obviously trying to repress some covert merriment.

“Didn’t you hear?” Mr. Ogilvie said at length. “Don’t you know what he called you? That man will be the death of me—for he’s always at it. He announced you as Sir Thief Macleod—I will swear he did.”

“I should not have thought he had so much historical knowledge,” Macleod answered, gravely. “He must have been reading up about the clans.”

At this moment Lady Beauregard, who had been receiving some other late visitors, came up and said she wished to introduce him to—he could not make out the name. He followed her. He was introduced to a stout elderly lady, who still had beautifully fine features, and a simple and calm air which rather impressed him. It is true that at first a thrill of compassion went through him; for he thought that some accident had befallen the poor lady’s costume, and that it had fallen down a bit unknown to herself; but he soon perceived that most of the other women were dressed similarly, some of the younger ones, indeed, having the back of their dress open practically to the waist. He wondered what his mother and Janet would say to this style.

“Don’t you think the Princess is looking pale?” he was asked.

"I thought she looked very pretty—I never saw her before," said he.

What next? That calm air was a trifle cold and distant. He did not know who the woman was, or where she lived, or whether her husband had any shooting, or a yacht, or a pack of hounds. What was he to say? He returned to the Princess.

"I only saw her as she was leaving," said he. "We came late. We were at the Piccadilly Theatre."

"Oh, you saw Miss Gertrude White," said this stout lady; and he was glad to see her eyes light up with some interest. "She is very clever, is she not—and so pretty and engaging. I wish I knew some one who knew her."

"I know some friends of hers," Macleod said, rather timidly.

"Oh, do you, really? Do you think she would give me a morning performance for my Fund?"

This lady seemed to take it so much for granted that every one must have heard of her Fund that he dared not confess his ignorance. But it was surely some charitable thing; and how could he doubt that Miss White would immediately respond to such an appeal?

"I should think that she would," said he, with a little hesitation; but at this moment some other claimant came forward, and he turned away to seek young Ogilvie once more.

"Ogilvie," said he, "who is that lady in the green satin?"

"The Duchess of Wexford."

"Has she a Fund?"

"A what?"

"A Fund—a charitable Fund of some sort."

"Oh, let me see. I think she is getting up money for a new training ship—turning the young ragamuffins about the streets into sailors, don't you know?"

"Do you think Miss White would give a morning performance for that Fund?"

"Miss White! Miss White! Miss White!" said Lieutenant Ogilvie. "I think Miss White has got into your head."

"But the lady asked me."

"Well, I should say it was exactly the thing that Miss White would like to do—get mixed up with a whole string of duchesses and marchionesses—a capital advertisement—and it would be all the more distinguished if it was an ama-

teur performance, and Miss Gertrude White the only professional admitted into the charmed circle."

"You are a very shrewd boy, Ogilvie," Macleod observed. "I don't know how you ever got so much wisdom into so small a head."

And indeed, as Lieutenant Ogilvie was returning to Aldershot by what he was pleased to call the cold-meat train, he continued to play the part of menior for a time with great assiduity, until Macleod was fairly confused with the number of persons to whom he was introduced, and the remarks his friend made about them. What struck him most, perhaps, was the recurrence of old Highland or Scotch family names, borne by persons who were thoroughly English in their speech and ways. Fancy a Gordon who said "lock" for "loch;" a Mackenzie who had never seen the Lewis; a Mac Alpine who had never heard the proverb, "The hills, the Mac Alpines, and the devil came into the world at the same time!"

It was a pretty scene: and he was young, and eager, and curious, and he enjoyed it. After standing about for half an hour or so, he got into a corner from which, in quiet, he could better see the brilliant picture as a whole: the bright, harmonious dresses; the glimpses of beautiful eyes and blooming complexions; the masses of foxgloves which Lady Beau-regard had as the only floral decoration of the evening; the pale canary-colored panels and silver-fluted columns of the walls; and over all the various candelabra, each bearing a cluster of sparkling and golden stars. But there was something wanted. Was it the noble and silver-haired lady of Castle Dare whom he looked for in vain in that brilliant crowd that moved and murmured before him? Or was it the friendly and familiar face of his cousin Janet, whose eyes he knew, would be filled with a constant wonder if she saw such diamonds, and silks and satins? Or was it that *ignis fatuus*—that treacherous and mocking fire—that might at any time glimmer in some suddenly presented face with a new surprise? Had she deceived him altogether down at Prince's Gate? Was her real nature that of the wayward, bright, mischievous, spoiled child whose very tenderness only prepared her unsuspecting victim for a merciless thrust? And yet the sound of her sobbing was still in his ears. A true woman's heart beat beneath that idle raillery: challenged boldly, would it not answer loyally and without fear?

Psychological puzzles were new to this son of the mountains; and it is no wonder that, long after he had bidden good

bye to his friend Ogilvie, and as he sat thinking alone in his own room, with Oscar lying across the rug at his feet, his mind refused to be quieted. One picture after another presented itself to his imagination: the proud-souled enthusiast longing for the wild winter nights and the dark Atlantic seas; the pensive maiden, shuddering to hear the fierce story of Maclean of Lochbuy; the spoiled child, teasing her mamma and petting her canary; the wronged and weeping woman, her frame shaken with sobs, her hands clasped in despair; the artful and demure coquette, mocking her lover with her sentimental farewells. Which of them all was she? Which should he see in the morning? Or would she appear as some still more elusive vision, retreating before him as he advanced?

Had he asked himself, he would have said that these speculations were but the fruit of a natural curiosity. Why should he not be interested in finding out the real nature of this girl, whose acquaintance he had just made? It has been observed, however, that young gentlemen do not always betray this frantic devotion to psychological inquiry when the subject of it, instead of being a fascinating maiden of twenty, is a homely-featured lady of fifty.

Time passed; another cigar was lit; the blue light outside was becoming silvery; and yet the problem remained unsolved. A fire of impatience and restlessness was burning in his heart; a din as of brazen instruments—what was the air the furious orchestra played?—was in his ears; sleep or rest was out of the question.

“Oscar!” he called. “Oscar, my lad, let us go out!”

When he stealthily went downstairs, and opened the door and passed into the street, behold! the new day was shining abroad—and how cold, and still, and silent it was after the hot glare and whirl of that bewildering night! No living thing was visible. A fresh, sweet air stirred the leaves of the trees and bushes in St. James’s Square. There was a pale lemon-yellow glow in the sky, and the long, empty thoroughfare of Pall Mall seemed coldly white.

Was this a somnambulist, then, who wandered idly along through the silent streets, apparently seeing nothing of the closed doors and the shuttered windows on either hand? A policeman, standing at the corner of Waterloo Place, stared at the apparition—at the twin apparition, for this tall young gentleman with the light top-coat thrown over his evening dress was accompanied by a beautiful collie that kept close

to his heels. There was a solitary four-wheeled cab at the foot of the Haymarket; but the man had got inside and was doubtless asleep. The embankment?—with the young trees stirring in the still morning air; and the broad bosom of the river catching the gathering glow of the skys. He leaned on the gray stone parapet, and looked out on the placid waters of the stream.

Placid, indeed, they were as they went flowing quietly by; and the young day promised to be bright enough; and why should there be aught but peace and goodwill upon earth toward all men and women? Surely there was no call for any unrest, or fear, or foreboding? The still and shining morning was but emblematic of his life—if only he knew, and were content. And indeed he looked contented enough, as he wandered on, breathing the cool freshness of the air, and with a warmer light from the east now touching from time to time his sun-tanned face. He went up to Covent Garden—for mere curiosity's sake. He walked along Piccadilly, and thought the elms in the Green Park looked more beautiful than ever. When he returned to his rooms he was of opinion that it was scarcely worth while to go to bed; and so he changed his clothes, and called for breakfast as soon as some one was up. In a short time—after his newspaper had been read—he would have to go down to Charing Cross.

What of this morning walk? Perhaps it was unimportant enough. Only, in after-times, he once or twice thought of it; and very clearly indeed he could see himself standing there in the early light, looking out on the shining waters of the river. They say that when you see yourself too vividly—when you imagine that you yourself are standing before yourself—that is one of the signs of madness.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUMMER DAY ON THE THAMES.

It occurred to him as he walked down to the station—perhaps he went early on the chance of finding her there alone—that he ought seriously to study the features of this girl's face; for was there not a great deal of character to be

learned, or guessed at, that way? He had but the vaguest notion of what she was really like. He knew that her teeth were pearly white when she smiled, and that the rippling golden-brown hair lay rather low on a calm and thoughtful forehead; but he had a less distinct impression that her nose was perhaps the least thing *retroussée*; and as to her eyes? They might be blue, gray, or green, but one thing he was sure of, was that they could speak more than was ever uttered by any speech. He knew, besides, that she had an exquisite figure: perhaps it was the fact that her shoulders were a trifle squarer than is common with women that made her look somewhat taller than she really was.

He would confirm or correct these vague impressions. And as the chances were that they would spend a whole long day together, he would have abundant opportunity of getting to know something about the character and disposition of this new acquaintance, so that she should no longer be to him a puzzling and distracting will-o'-the-wisp. What had he come to London for but to improve his knowledge of men and of women, and to see what was going on in the larger world? And so this earnest student walked down to the station.

There were a good many people about, mostly in groups chatting with each other; but he recognized no one. Perhaps he was looking out for Colonel and Mrs. Ross; perhaps for a slender figure in black, with blue beads; at all events, he was gazing somewhat vacantly around when some one turned close by him. Then his heart stood still for a second. The sudden light that sprang to her face when she recognized him blinded him. Was it to be always so? Was she always to come upon him in a flash, as it were? What chance had the poor student of fulfilling his patient task when, on his approach, he was sure to be met by this surprise of the parted lips, and sudden smile, and bright look? He was far too bewildered to examine the outline of her nose or the curve of the exquisitely short upper lip.

But the plain truth was that there was no entravagant joy at all in Miss White's face, but a very slight and perhaps pleased surprise; and she was not in the least embarrassed.

"Are you looking for Mrs. Ross," said she, "like myself?"

"Yes," said he; and then he found himself exceedingly anxious to say a great deal to her, without knowing where to begin. She had surprised him too much—as usual. She was so different from what he had been dreaming about.

Here was no one of the imaginary creatures that had risen before his mind during the stillness of the night. Even the pale dreamer in black and blue beads was gone. He found before him (as far as he could make out) a quiet, bright-faced, self-possessed girl, clad in a light and cool costume of white, with bits of black velvet about it; and her white gloves and sunshade, and the white silver chain round her slender waist, were important features in the picture she presented. How could this eager student of character get rid of the distressing trivialities? All night long he had been dreaming of beautiful sentiments and conflicting emotions: now his first thought was that he had never seen any costume so delightfully cool, and clear, and summer-like. To look at her was to think of a mountain spring, icy cold even in the sunshine.

"I always come early," said she, in the most matter-of-fact way. "I cannot bear hurry in catching a train."

Of course not. How could any one associate rattling cabs, and excited porters, and frantic mobs with this serene creature, who seemed to have been wafted to Charing Cross on a cloud? And if he had had his will, there would have been no special train to disturb her repose. She would have embarked in a noble barge, and lain upon couches of swans-down, and ample awnings of silk would have sheltered her from the sun, while the beautiful craft floated away down the river, its crimson hangings here and there just touching the rippling waters.

"Ought we to take tickets?"

That was what she actually said; but what those eloquent, innocent eyes seemed to say was, "*Can you read what we have to tell you? Don't you know what a simple and confiding soul appeals to you?—clear as the daylight in its truth. Cannot you look through us and see the trusting, tender soul within?*"

"Perhaps we had better wait for Colonel Ross," said he; and there was a little pronoun in this sentence that he would like to have repeated. It was a friendly word. It established a sort of secret companionship. It is the proud privilege of a man to know all about railway tickets; but he rather preferred this association with her helpless innocence and ignorance.

"I had no idea you were coming to-day. I rather like those surprise parties. Mrs. Ross never thought of going until last evening, she says. Oh, by the way, I saw you in the theatre last evening."

He almost started. He had quite forgotten that this self-

possessed, clear-eyed, pale girl was the madcap coquette whose caprices and griefs had alternately fascinated and moved him on the previous evening.

"Oh, indeed," he stammered. "It was a great pleasure to me—and a surprise. Lieutenant Ogilvie played a trick upon me. He did not tell me before we went that—that you were to appear."

She looked amused.

"You did not know, then, when we met at Mrs. Ross's that I was engaged at the Piccadilly Theatre?"

"Not in the least," he said, earnestly, as if he wished her distinctly to understand that he could not have imagined such a thing to be possible.

"You should have let me send you a box. We have another piece in rehearsal. Perhaps you will come to see that."

Now if these few sentences, uttered by those two young people in the noisy railway station, be taken by themselves and regarded, they will be found to consist of the dullest commonplace. No two strangers in all that crowd could have addressed each other in a more indifferent fashion. But the trivial nothings which the mouth utters may become possessed of awful import when accompanied by the language of the eyes; and the poor commonplace sentences may be taken up and translated so that they shall stand written across the memory in letters of flashing sunlight and the colors of June. "*Ought we to take tickets?*" There was not much poetry in the phrase but she lifted her eyes just then.

And now Colonel Ross and his wife appeared, accompanied by the only other friend they could get at such short notice to join this scratch party—a demure little old lady who had a very large house on Campden Hill which everybody coveted. They were just in time to get comfortably seated in the spacious saloon carriage that had been reserved for them. The train slowly glided out of the station, and then began to rattle away from the midst of London. Glimpses of a keener blue began to appear. The gardens were green with the foliage of the early summer; martins swept across the still pools, a spot of white when they got into the shadow. And Miss White would have as many windows open as possible, so that the sweet June air swept right through the long carriage.

And was she not a very child in her enjoyment of this sudden escape into the country? The rapid motion, the

silvery light, the sweet air, the glimpses of orchards, and farm-houses, and millstreams—all were a delight to her; and although she talked in a delicate, half-reserved, shy way with that low voice of hers, still there was plenty of vivacity and gladness in her eyes. They drove from Gravesend station to the river-side. They passed through the crowd waiting to see the yachts start. They got on board the steamer; and at the very instant that Macleod stepped from the gangway on to the deck, the military band on board, by some strange coincidence, struck up "A Highland lad my love was born." Mrs. Ross laughed, and wondered whether the band-master had recognized her husband.

And now they turned to the river; and there were the narrow and shapely cutters, with their tall spars, and their pennons fluttering in the sunlight. They lay in two tiers across the river, four in each tier, the first row consisting of small forty-tonners, the more stately craft behind. A brisk northeasterly wind was blowing, causing the bosom of the river to flash in ripples of light. Boats of every size and shape moved up and down and across the stream. The sudden firing of a gun caused some movement among the red-capped mariners of the four yachts in front.

"They are standing by the main halyards," said Colonel Ross to his women-folk. "Now watch for the next signal."

Another gun was fired; and all of a sudden there was a rattling of blocks and chains, and the four mainsails slowly rose, and the flapping jibs were run out. The bows drifted round: which would get way on her first? But now there was a wild uproar of voices. The boom end of one of the yachts had caught one of the stays of her companion, and both were brought up head to wind. Cutter No. 3 took advantage of the mishap to sail through the lee of both her enemies, and got clear away, with the sunlight shining full on her bellying canvas. But there was no time to watch the further adventures of the forty-tonners. Here and closer at hand were the larger craft, and high up in the rigging were the mites of men, ready to drop into the air, clinging on to the halyards. The gun is fired. Down they come, swinging in the air; and the moment they have reached the deck they are off and up the ratlines again, again to drop into the air until the gaff is high hoisted, the peak swinging this way and that, and the gray folds of the main-sail lazily flapping in the wind. The steamer begins to roar. The yachts fall away from their moorings, and one by one the sails fill out to the

fresh breeze. And now all is silence and an easy gliding motion, for the eight competitors have all started away, and the steamer is smoothly following them.

"How beautiful they are!—like splendid swans," Miss White said: she had a glass in her hand, but did not use it, for as yet the stately fleet was near enough.

"A swan has a body," said Macleod. "These things seem to me to be all wings. It is all canvas, and no hull."

And, indeed, when the large top-sails and big jibs came to be set, it certainly seemed as if there was nothing below to steady this vast extent of canvas. Macleod was astonished. He could not believe that people were so reckless as to go out in boats like that.

"If they were up in our part of the world," said he, "a puff of wind from the Gribun Cliffs would send the whole fleet to the bottom."

"They know better than to try," Colonel Ross said, "Those yachts are admirably suited for the Thames; and Thames yachting is a very nice thing. It is very close to London. You can take a day's fresh air when you like, without going all the way to Cowes. You can get back to town in time to dine."

"I hope so," said Miss White, with emphasis.

"Oh, you need not be afraid," her host said, laughing. "They only go round the Nore; and with this steady breeze they ought to be back early in the afternoon. My dear Miss White, we sha'n't allow you to disappoint the British public."

"So I may abandon myself to complete idleness without concern?"

"Most certainly."

And it was an enjoyable sort of idleness. The river was full of life and animation as they glided along; fitful shadows and bursts of sunshine crossed the foliage and pasture-lands of the flat shores; the yellow surface of the stream was broken with gleams of silver; and always, when this somewhat tame, and peaceful, and pretty landscape tended to become monotonous, they had on this side or that the spectacle of one of those tall and beautiful yachts rounding on a new tack or creeping steadily up on one of her opponents. They had a sweepstakes, of course, and Macleod drew the favorite. But then he proceeded to explain to Miss White that the handicapping by means of time allowances made the choice of a favorite a mere matter of guesswork; that the fouling at

the start was of but little moment : and that on the whole she ought to exchange yachts with him.

"But if the chances are all equal, why should your yacht be better than mine?" said she.

The argument was unanswerable; but she took the favorite for all that, because he wished her to do so; and she tendered him in return the bit of folded paper with the name of a rival yacht on it. It had been in her purse for a minute or two. It was scented when she handed it to him.

"I should like to go to the Medditerranean in one of those beautiful yachts," she said, looking away across the troubled waters, "and lie and dream under the blue skies. I should want no other occupation than that: that would be real idleness, with a breath of wind now and then to temper the heat; and an awning over the deck; and a lot of books. Life would go by like a dream."

Her eyes were distant and pensive. To fold the bits of paper, she had taken off her gloves: he regarded the small white hands, with the blue veins and the pink, almond-shaped nails. She was right. That was the proper sort of existence for one so fine and pale, and perfect even to the finger-tips. Rose Leaf—Rose Leaf—what faint wind will carry you away to the south?

At this moment the band struck up a lively air. What was it?

"O this is no my ain lassie,
Fair though the lassie be."

"You are in great favor, to-day, Hugh," Mrs. Ross said to her husband. "You will have to ask the band-master to lunch with us."

But this sharp alterative of a well-known air had sent Macleod's thoughts flying away northward, to scenes far different from these flat shores, and to a sort of boating very different from this summer sailing. Janet, too: what was she thinking of—far away in Castle Dare? Of the wild morning on which she insisted on crossing to one of the Freshnist islands, because of the sick child of a shepherd there; and of the open herring smack, and she sitting on the ballast stones; and of the fierce gale of wind and rain that hid the island from their sight; and of her landing, drenched to the skin, and with the salt-water running from her hair and down her face?

"Now for lunch," said Colonel Ross; and they went below.

The bright little saloon was decorated with flowers ; the colored glass on the table looked pretty enough ; here was a pleasant break in the monotony of the day. It was an occasion, too, for assiduous helpfulness, and gentle inquiries, and patient attention. They forgot about the various chances of the yachts. They could not at once have remembered the name of the favorite. And there was a good deal of laughter and pleasant chatting, while the band overhead—heard through the open skylight—still played,

“ O this is no my ain lassie,
Kind though the lassie be.”

And behold ! when they went up on deck again they had got ahead of all the yachts, and were past the forts at the mouth of the Medway, and were out on an open space of yellowish-green water that showed where the tide of the sea met the current of the river. And away down there in the south, a long spur of land ran out at the horizon, and the sea immediately under was still and glassy, so that the neck of land seemed projected into the sky—a sort of gigantic razor-fish suspended in the silvery clouds. Then, to give the yachts time to overtake them, they steamed over to a mighty iron-clad that lay at anchor there ; and as they came near her vast black bulk they lowered their flag, and the band played “Rule, Britannia.” The salute was returned ; the officer on the high quarterdeck raised his cap ; they steamed on.

In due course of time they reached the Nore lightship, and there they lay and drifted about until the yachts should come up. Long distances now separated that summer fleet ; but as they came along, lying well over before the brisk breeze, it was obvious that the spaces of time between the combatants would not be great. And is not this Miss White’s vessel, the favorite in the betting, that comes sheering through the water, with white foam at her bows ? Surely she is more than her time allowance ahead ? And on this tack will she get clear round the ruddy little lightship, or is there not a danger of her carrying off a bowsprit ? With what an ease and majesty she comes along, scarcely dipping to the slight summer waves, while they on board notice that she has put out her long spinnaker boom, ready to hoist a great balloon as soon as she is round the lightship and running home before the wind. The speed at which she cuts the water is now visible enough as she obscures for a second or so the

hull of the lightship. In another second she has sheered round; and then the great spinnaker bulges out with the breeze, and away she goes up the river again. Chronometers are in request. It is only a matter of fifty seconds that the nearest rival, now coming sweeping along, has to make up. But what is this that happens just as the enemy has got round the Nore? There is a cry of "Man overboard!" The spinnaker boom has caught the careless skipper and pitched him clean into the splashing waters, where he floats about, not as yet certain, probably, what course his vessel will take. She at once brings her head up to wind and puts about; but meanwhile a small boat from the lightship has picked up the unhappy skipper, and is now pulling hard to strike the course of the yacht on her new tack. In another minute or two he is on board again; and away she goes for home.

"I think you have won the sweepstakes, Miss White," Macleod said. "Your enemy has lost eight minutes."

She was not thinking of sweepstakes. She seemed to have been greatly frightened by the accident.

"It would have been so dreadful to see a man drowned before your eyes—in the midst of a mere holiday excursion."

"Drowned?" he cried. "There? If a sailor lets himself get drowned in this water, with all these boats about, he deserves it."

"But there are many sailors who cannot swim at all."

"More shame for them," said he.

"Why, Sir Keith," said Mrs. Ross, laughing, "do you think that all people have been brought up to an amphibious life like yourself? I suppose in your country, what with the rain and the mist, you seldom know whether you are on sea or shore."

"That is quite true," said he, gravely. "And the children are all born with fins. And we can hear the mermaids singing all day long. And when we want to go anywhere, we get on the back of a dolphin."

But he looked at Gertrude White. What would she say about that far land that she had shown such a deep interest in? There was no raillery at all in her low voice as she spoke.

"I can very well understand," she said, "how the people there fancied they heard the mermaids singing—amidst so much mystery, and with the awfulness of the sea around them."

"But we have had living singers," said Macleod, "and that among the Macleods, too. The most famous of all the

song-writers of the Western Highlands was Mary Macleod, that was born in Harris—Mairi Nighean Alasdair ruaidh, they called her, that is, Mary, the daughter of Red Alister. Macleod of Dunvegan, he wished her not to make any more songs; but she could not cease the making of songs. And there was another Macleod—Fionaghal, they called her, that is, the Fair Stranger. I do not know why they called her the Fair Stranger—perhaps she came to the Highlands from some distant place. And I think if you were going among the people there at this very day, they would call you the Fair Stranger.”

He spoke quite naturally and thoughtlessly: his eyes met hers only for a second; he did not notice the soft touch of pink that suffused the delicately tinted cheek.

“What did you say was the name of that mysterious stranger?” asked Mrs. Ross—“that poetess from unknown lands?”

“Fionaghal,” he answered.

She turned to her husband.

“Hugh,” she said, “let me introduce you to our mysterious guest. This is Fionaghal—this is the Fair Stranger from the islands—this is the poetess whose melodies the mermaids have picked up. If she only had a harp, now—with seaweed hanging from it—and an oval mirror——”

The booming of a gun told them that the last yacht had rounded the lightship. The band struck up a lively air, and presently the steamer was steaming off in the wake of the procession of yachts. There was now no more fear that Miss White should be late. The breeze had kept up well, and had now shifted a point to the east, so that the yachts, with their great ballooners, were running pretty well before the wind. The lazy abandonment of the day became more complete than ever. Careless talk and laughter; an easy curiosity about the fortunes of the race; tea in the saloon, with the making up of two bouquets of white roses, sweet-peas, fuchias, and ferns—the day passed lightly and swiftly enough. It was a summer day, full of pretty trifles. Macleod, surrendering to the fascination, began to wonder what life would be if it were all a show of June colors and a sound of dreamy music: for one thing, he could not imagine this sensitive, beautiful, pale, fine creature otherwise than as surrounded by an atmosphere of delicate attentions and pretty speeches, and sweet, low laughter.

They got into their special train again at Gravesend, and

were whirled up to London. At Charing Cross he bade good-bye to Miss White, who was driven off by Mr. and Mrs. Ross along with their other guest. In the light of the clear June evening he walked rather absently up to his rooms.

There was a letter lying on the table. He seized it and opened it with gladness. It was from his cousin Janet, and the mere sight of it seemed to revive him like a gust of keen wind from the sea. What had she to say? About the grumbling of Donald, who seemed to have no more pride in his pipes, now the master was gone? About the anxiety of his mother over the reports of the keepers? About the upsetting of a dog-cart on the road to Lochbuy? He had half resolved to go to the theatre again that evening—getting, if possible, into some corner where he might pursue his profound psychological investigations unseen—but now he thought he would not go. He would spend the evening in writing a long letter to his cousin, telling her and the mother about all the beautiful, fine, gay, summer life he had seen in London—so different from anything they could have seen in Fort William, or Inverness, or even in Edinburgh. After dinner he sat down to this agreeable task. What had he to write about except brilliant rooms, and beautiful flowers, and costumes such as would have made Janet's eyes wide—of all the delicate luxuries of life, and happy idleness, and the careless enjoyment of people whose only thought was about a new pleasure? He gave a minute description of all the places he had been to see—except the theatre. He mentioned the names of the people who had been kind to him; but he said nothing about Gertrude White.

Not that she was altogether absent from his thoughts. Sometimes his fancy fled away from the sheet of paper before him, and saw strange things. Was this Fionaghal the Fair Stranger—this maiden who had come over the seas to the dark shores of the isles—this king's daughter clad in white, with her yellow hair down to her waist and bands of gold on her wrists? And what does she sing to the lashing waves but songs of high courage, and triumph, and welcome to her brave lover coming home with plunder through the battling seas? Her lips are parted with her singing, but her glance is bold and keen: she has the spirit of a king's daughter, let her come from whence she may.

Or is Fionaghal the Fair Stranger this poorly dressed lass who boils the potatoes over the rude peat fire, and croons her songs of suffering and of the cruel drowning in the seas,

so that from hut to hut they carry her songs, and the old wives' tears start afresh to think of their brave sons lost years and years ago?

Neither Fionaghal is she—this beautiful, pale woman, with her sweet, modern English speech, and her delicate, sensitive ways, and her hand that might be crushed like a rose leaf. There is a shimmer of summer around her; flowers lie in her lap; tender observances encompass and shelter her. Not for her the biting winds of the northern seas; but rather the soft luxurious idleness of placid waters, and blue skies, and shadowy shores . . . *Rose Leaf! Rose Leaf! what faint wind will carry you away to the south?*

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE.

LATE one night a carefully dressed elderly gentleman applied his latch-key to the door of a house in Bury Street, St. James's, and was about to enter without any great circumspection, when he was suddenly met by a white phantom, which threw him off his legs, and dashed outward into the street. The language that the elderly gentleman used, as he picked himself up, need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that the white phantom was the dog Oscar, who had been shut in a minute before by his master, and who now, after one or two preliminary dashes up and down the street, very soon perceived the tall figure of Macleod, and made joyfully after him. But Oscar knew that he had acted wrongly, and was ashamed to show himself; so he quietly slunk along at his master's heels. The consequence of this was that the few loiterers about beheld the very unusual spectacle of a tall young gentleman walking down Bury Street and into King Street, dressed in full Highland costume, and followed by a white-and-lemon collie. No other person going to the Caledonian fancy-dress ball was so attended.

Macleod made his way through the carriages, crossed the pavement, and entered the passage. Then he heard some scuffling behind, and he turned.

"Let alone my dog, you fellow!" said he, making a step

forward, for the man had got hold of Oscar by the head, and was hauling him out.

"Is it your dog, sir?" said he.

Oscar himself answered by wrestling himself free and taking refuge by his master's legs, though he still looked guilty.

"Yes, he is my dog; and a nice fix he has got me into," said Macleod, standing aside to let the Empress Maria Theresa pass by in her resplendent costume. "I suppose I must walk home with him again. Oscar, Oscar, how dare you?"

"If you please, sir," said a juvenile voice behind him, "if Mr.—— will let me, I will take the dog. I know where to tie him up."

Macleod turned.

"*Co an so?*" said he, looking down at the chubby-faced boy in the kilts, who had his pipes under his arm. "Don't yon know the Gaelic?"

"I am only learning," said the young musician. "Will I take the dog, sir?"

"March along, then, *Phiobaire bhig!*" Macleod said. "He will follow me, if he will not follow you."

Little Piper turned aside into a large hall which had been transformed into a sort of waiting-room; and here Macleod found himself in the presence of a considerable number of children, half of them girls, half of them boys, all dressed in tartan, and seated on the forms along the walls. The children, who were half asleep at this time of the night, woke up with sudden interest at sight of the beautiful collie; and at the same moment Little Piper explained to the gentleman who was in charge of these young ones that the dog had to be tied up somewhere, and that a small adjoining room would answer that purpose. The proposal was most courteously entertained. Macleod, Mr. ——, and Little Piper walked along to this side room, and there Oscar was properly secured.

"And I will get him some water, sir, if he wants it," said the boy in the kilts.

"Very well," Macleod said. "And I will give you my thanks for it; for that is all that a Highlander, and especially a piper, expects for a kindness. And I hope you will learn the Gaelic soon, my boy. And do you know '*Cumhadh na Cloinne?*' No, it is too difficult for you; but I think if I had the chanter between my fingers myself, I could let you hear '*Cumhadh na Cloinne.*'"

"I am sure John Maclean can play ^{the small} piper.

"Who is he?"

The gentleman in charge of the youngsters explained that John Maclean was the eldest of the juvenile pipers, five others of whom were in attendance.

"I think," said Macleod, "that I am coming down in a little time to make the acquaintance of your young pipers; if you will let me."

He passed up the broad staircase and into the empty supper-room, from which a number of entrances showed him the strange scene being enacted in the larger hall. Who were these people who were moving to the sound of rapid music? A clown in a silken dress of many colors, with bells to his cap and wrists, stood at one of the doors. Macleod became his fellow-spectator of what was going forward. A beautiful Tyrolienne, in a dress of black, silver, and velvet, with her yellow hair hanging in two plaits down her back, passed into the room, accompanied by Charles the First in a large wig and cloak; and the next moment they were whirling along in the waltz, coming into innumerable collisions with all the celebrated folk who ever lived in history. And who were these gentlemen in the scarlet collars and cuffs, who but for these adornments would have been in ordinary evening dress? he made bold to ask the friendly clown, who was staring in a pensive manner at the rushing couples.

"They call it the Windsor uniform," said the clown. "I think it mean. I sha'n't come in a fancy dress again, if stitching on a red collar will do."

At this moment the waltz came to an end, and the people began to walk up and down the spacious apartment. Macleod entered the throng to look about him. And soon he perceived, in one of the little stands at the side of the hall, the noble lady who had asked him to go to this assembly, and forthwith he made his way through the crowd to her. He was most graciously received.

"Shall I tell you a secret, Lady ——?" said he. "You know the children belonging to the charity; they are all below, and they are sitting doing nothing, and they are all very tired and half asleep. It is a shame to keep them there——"

"But the Prince hasn't come yet; and they must be marched round: they show that we are not making fools of ourselves for nothing."

A sharper person than Macleod might have got in a pretty

compliment here : for this lady was charmingly dressed as Flora Macdonald ; but he merely said :—

“ Very well ; perhaps it is necessary. But I think I can get them some amusement, if you will only keep the director of them, that is, Mr——, out of the way. Now shall I send him to you ? Will you talk to him ? ”

“ What do you mean to do ? ”

“ I want to give them a dance. Why should you have all the dancing up here ? ”

“ Mind, I am not responsible. What shall I talk to him about ? ”

Macleod considered for a moment.

“ Tell him that I will take the whole of the girls and boys to the Crystal Palace for a day, if it is permissible ; and ask him what it will cost, and all about the arrangements. ”

“ Seriously ? ”

“ Yes. Why not ? They can have a fine run in the grounds, and six pipers to play for them. I will ask them now whether they will go. ”

He left and went downstairs. He had seen but few people in the hall above whom he knew. He was not fond of dancing, though he knew the elaborate variations of the reel. And here was a bit of practical amusement.

“ Oh, Mr. ——, ” said he, with great seriousness, “ I am desired by Lady —— to say that she would like to see you for a moment or two. She wishes to ask you some questions about your young people. ”

“ The Prince may come at any moment, ” said Mr. —— doubtfully.

“ He won’t be in such a hurry as all that, surely. ”

So the worthy man went upstairs ; and the moment he was gone Macleod shut the door.

“ Now, you piper boys ! ” he called aloud, “ get up and play us a reel. We are going to have a dance. You are all asleep, I believe. Come, girls stand up. You that know the reel, you will keep to this end. Boys, come out. You that can dance a reel, come to this end ; the others will soon pick it up. Now, piper boys, have you got the steam up ? What can you give us, now ? ‘ Monymusk ? ’ or the ‘ Marquis of Huntley’s Fling ? ’ or ‘ Miss Johnston ? ’ Nay, stay a bit. Don’t you know ‘ Mrs. Macleod of Raasay ? ’ ”

“ Yes, ” “ Yes, ” “ Yes, ” “ Yes, ” “ Yes, ” “ Yes, ” came from the six pipers, all standing in a row, with the drones over their shoulders and the chanters in their fingers.

"Very well, then—off you go! Now, boys and girls, are you all ready? Pipers, 'Mrs. Macleod of Raasay!'"

For a second there was a confused roaring on the long drones; then the shrill chanters broke clear away into the wild reel; and presently the boys and girls, who were at first laughingly shy and embarrassed, began to make such imitations of the reel figure, which they had seen often enough, as led to a vast amount of scrambling and jollity, if it was not particularly accurate. The most timid of the young ones soon picked up courage. Here and there one of the older boys gave a whoop that would have done justice to a wedding dance in a Highland barn.

"Put your lungs into it, pipers!" Macleod cried out, "Well played, boys! You are fit to play before a prince?"

The round cheeks of the boys were red with their blowing; they tapped their toes on the ground as proudly as if every one of them was a MacCruimin; the wild noise in this big, empty hall grew more furious than ever—when suddenly there was an awful silence. The pipers whipped the chanters from their mouths; the children, suddenly stopping in their merriment, cast one awestruck glance at the door, and then slunk back to their seats. They had observed not only Mr. —, but also the Prince himself. Macleod was left standing alone in the middle of the floor.

"Sir Keith Macleod?" said his Royal Highness, with a smile.

Macleod bowed low.

"Lady — told me what you were about. I thought we could have had a peep unobserved, or we should not have broken in on the romp of the children."

"I think your Royal Highness could make amends for that," said Macleod.

There was an inquiring glance.

"If your Royal Highness would ask some one to see that each of the children has an orange, and a tart, and a shilling, it would be some compensation to them for being kept up so late."

"I think that might be done," said the Prince, as he turned to leave. "And I am glad to have made your acquaintance, although in—"

"In the character of a dancing-master," said Macleod, gravely.

After having once more visited Oscar, in the company of Phiobaire bhig, Macleod went up again to the brilliantly lit

hall ; and here he found that a further number of his friends had arrived. Among them was young Ogilvie, in the tartan of the Ninety-third Highlanders ; and very smart indeed the boy-officer looked in his uniform. Mrs. Ross was here too and she was busy in assisting to get up the Highland quadrille. When she asked Macleod if he would join in it, he answered by asking her to be his partner, as he would be ashamed to display his ignorance before an absolute stranger. Mrs. Ross most kindly undertook to pilot him through the not elaborate intricacies of the dance ; and they were fortunate in having the set made up entirely of their own friends.

Then the procession of the children took place ; and the fantastically dressed crowd formed a lane to let the homely-clad lads and lasses pass along, with the six small pipers proudly playing a march at their head.

He stopped the last of the children for a second.

“ Have you got a tart, and an orange, and a shilling ? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ I have got the word of a prince for it,” he said to himself, as he went out of the room ; “ and they shall not go home with empty pockets.”

As he was coming up the staircase again to the ballroom he was preceded by two figures that were calculated to attract any one’s notice by the picturesqueness of their costume. The one stranger was apparently an old man, who was dressed in a Florentine costume of the fourteenth century—a cloak of sombre red, with a flat cap of black velvet, one long tail of which was thrown over the left shoulder and hung down behind. A silver collar hung from his neck across his breast : other ornament there was none. His companion, however, drew all eyes toward her as the two passed into the ball-room. She was dressed in imitation of Gainsborough’s portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire ; and her symmetrical figure and well-poised head admirably suited the long trained costume of blue satin, with its *fichu* of white muslin, the bold coquettish hat and feathers, and the powdered puffs and curls that descended to her shoulders. She had a gay air with her, too. She bore her head proudly. The patches on her cheek seemed not half so black as the blackness of her eyes, so full of a dark mischievous light were they ; and the redness of the lips—a trifle artificial, no doubt—as she smiled seemed to add to the glittering whiteness of her teeth. The proud,

laughing, gay coquette : no wonder all eyes were for a moment turned to her, in envy or in admiration.

Macleod, following these two, and finding that his old companion, the pensive clown in cap and bells, was still at his post of observation at the door, remained there also for a minute or two, and noticed that among the first to recognize the two strangers was young Ogilvie, who with laughing surprise in his face, came forward to shake hands with them. Then there was some further speech; the band began to play a gentle and melodious waltz ; the middle of the room cleared somewhat ; and presently her Grace of Devonshire was whirled away by the young Highland officer, her broad-brimmed hat rather overshadowing him, notwithstanding the pronounced colors of his plaid. Macleod could not help following this couple with his eyes whithersoever they went. In any part of the rapidly moving crowd he could always make out that one figure ; and once or twice as they passed him it seemed to him that the brilliant beauty, with her powdered hair, and her flashing bright eyes, and her merry lips, regarded him for an instant ; and then he could have imagined that in a by-gone century—

“ Sir Keith Macleod, I think ? ”

The old gentleman with the grave and scholarly cap of black velvet and the long cloak of sober red held out his hand. The folds of the velvet hanging down from the cap rather shadowed his face ; but all the same Macleod instantly recognized him—fixing the recognition by means of the gold spectacles.

“ Mr. White ? ” said he.

“ I am more disguised than you are,” the old gentleman said, with a smile. “ It is a foolish notion of my daughter’s ; but she would have me come.”

His daughter ! Macleod turned in a bewildered way to that gay crowd under the brilliant lights.

“ Was that Miss White ? ” said he.

“ The Duchess of Devonshire. Didn’t you recognize her ? I am afraid she will be very tired to-morrow ; but she would come.”

He caught sight of her again—that woman, with the dark eyes full of fire, and the dashing air, and the audacious smile ! He could have believed this old man to be mad. Or was he only the father of a witch, of an illusive *ignis fatuus*, of some mocking Ariel darting into a dozen shapes to make fools of the poor simple souls of earth ?

"No," he stammered, "I—I did not recognize her. I thought the lady who came with you had intensely dark eyes."

"She is said to be very clever in making up," her father said; coolly and sententiously. "It is a part of her art that is not to be despised. It is quite as important as a gesture or a tone of voice in creating the illusion at which she aims. I do not know whether actresses, as a rule, are careless about it, or only clumsy; but they rarely succeed in making their appearance homogeneous. A trifle too much here, a trifle too little there, and the illusion is spoiled. Then you see a painted woman—not the character she is presenting. Did you observe my daughter's eyebrows?"

"No, sir, I did not," said Macleod, humbly.

"Here she comes. Look at them."

But how could he look at her eyebrows, or at any trick of making up, when the whole face, with its new excitement of color, its parted lips and lambent eyes, was throwing its fascination upon him? She came forward laughing, and yet with a certain shyness. He would fain have turned away.

The Highlanders are superstitious. Did he fear being bewitched? Or what was it that threw a certain coldness over his manner? The fact of her having danced with young Ogilvie? Or the ugly reference made by her father to her eyebrows? He had greatly admired this painted stranger when he thought she was a stranger; he seemed less to admire the artistic make-up of Miss Gertrude White.

The merry Duchess, playing her part admirably, charmed all eyes but his; and yet she was so kind as to devote herself to her father and him, refusing invitations to dance, and chatting to them—with those brilliant lips smiling—about the various features of the gay scene before them. Macleod avoided looking at her face.

"What a bonny boy your friend Mr. Ogilvie is!" said she, glancing across the room.

He did not answer.

"But he does not look much of a soldier," she continued.

"I don't think I should be afraid of him if I were a man."

He answered, somewhat distantly:—

"It is not safe to judge that way, especially of any one of Highland blood. If there is fighting in his blood, he will fight when the proper time comes. And we have a good Gaelic saying—it has a great deal of meaning in it, that saying—'*You do not know what sword is in the scabbard until it is drawn.*'"

"What did you say was the proverb?" she asked; and for a second her eyes met his; but she immediately withdrew them, startled by the cold austerity of his look.

"*You do not know what sword is in the scabbard until it is drawn,*" said he, carelessly. "There is a good deal of meaning in it."

CHAPTER VIII.

LAUREL COTTAGE.

A SMALL, quaint, old-fashioned house in South Bank, Regent's Park; two maidens in white in the open veranda; around them the abundant foliage of June, unruffled by any breeze; and down at the foot of the steep garden the still canal, its surface mirroring the soft translucent greens of the trees and bushes above, and the gaudier colors of a barge lying moored on the northern side. The elder of the two girls is seated in a rocking-chair; she appears to have been reading, for her right hand, hanging down, still holds a thin MS. book covered with coarse brown paper. The younger is lying at her feet, with her head thrown back in her sister's lap, and her face turned up to the clear June skies. There are some roses about this veranda, and the still air is sweet with them.

"And of all the parts you ever played in," she says, "which one did you like the best Gerty?"

"This one," is the gentle answer.

"What one?"

"Being at home with you and papa, and having no bother at all, and nothing to think of."

"I don't believe it," says the other, with the brutal frankness of thirteen. "You couldn't live without the theatre, Gerty—and the newspapers talking about you—and people praising you—and bouquets——"

"Couldn't I?" says Miss White, with a smile, as she gently lays her hand on her sister's curls.

"No," continues the wise young lady. "And besides, this pretty, quiet life would not last. You would have to give up playing that part. Papa is getting very old now; and he

often talks about what may happen to us. And you know, Gerty, that though it is very nice for sisters to say they will never and never leave each other, it doesn't come off, does it? There is only one thing I see for you—and that is to get married."

"Indeed!"

It is easy to fence with a child's prattle. She might have amused herself by encouraging this chatterbox to go through the list of their acquaintances, and pick out a goodly choice of suitors. She might have encouraged her to give expression to her profound views of the chances and troubles of life, and the safeguards that timid maidens may seek. But she suddenly said, in a highly matter-of-fact manner:—

"What you say is quite true, Carry, and I've thought of it several times. It is a very bad thing for an actress to be left without a father or husband, or brother, as her ostensible guardian. People are always glad to hear stories—and to make them—about actresses. You would be no good at all, Carry——"

"Very well, then," the younger sister said, promptly, "you've got to get married. And to a rich man, too; who will buy you a theatre, and let you do what you like in it."

Miss Gertrude White, whatever she may have thought of this speech, was bound to rebuke the shockingly mercenary ring in it."

"For shame, Carry! Do you think people marry from such motives as that?"

"I don't know," said Carry; but she had, at least, guessed.

"I should like my husband to have money, certainly," Miss White said, frankly; and here she flung the MS. book from her on to a neighboring chair. "I should like to be able to refuse parts that did not suit me. I should like to be able to take just such engagements as I chose. I should like to go to Paris for a whole year, and study hard——"

"Your husband might not wish you to remain an actress," said Miss Carry.

"Then he would never be my husband," the elder sister said, with decision. "I have not worked hard for nothing. Just when I begin to think I can do something—when I think I can get beyond those coquettish, drawing-room, simpering parts that people run after now—just when the very name of Mrs. Siddons, or Rachael, or any of the great actresses makes my heart jump—when I have ambition and a

fair chance, and all that—do you think I am to give the whole thing up, and sink quietly into the position of Mrs. Brown or Mrs. Smith, who is a very nice lady, no doubt, and very respectable, and lives a quiet and orderly life, with no greater excitement than scheming to get big people to go to her garden parties ? ”

She certainly seemed very clear on that point.

“ I don’t see that men are so ready to give up their professions, when they marry, in order to devote themselves to domestic life, even when they have plenty of money. Why should all the sacrifice be on the side of the woman ? But I know if I have to choose between my art and a husband, I shall continue to do without a husband.”

Miss Carry had risen, and put one arm round her sister’s neck, while with the other she stroked the soft brown hair over the smooth forehead.

“ And it shall not be taken away from its pretty theatre, it sha’n’t ! ” said she, pettingly ; “ and it shall not be asked to go away with any great ugly Bluebeard, and be shut up in a lonely house——”

“ Go away, Carry,” said she, releasing herself. “ I wonder why you began talking such nonsense. What do you know about all those things ? ”

“ Oh ! very well,” said the child, turning away with a pout ; and she pulled a rose and began to take its petals off, one by one, with her lips. “ Perhaps I don’t know. Perhaps I haven’t studied your manœuvres on the stage, Miss Gertrude White. Perhaps I never saw the newspapers declaring that it was all so very natural and life-like.” She flung two or three rose petals at her sister. “ I believe you’re the biggest flirt that ever lived, Gerty. You could make any man you liked marry you in ten minutes.”

“ I wish I could manage to have certain schoolgirls whipped and sent to bed.”

At this moment there appeared at the open French window an elderly woman of Flemish features and extraordinary breadth of bust.

“ Shall I put dressing in the salad, miss ? ” she said, with scarcely any trace of foreign accent.

“ Not yet, Marie,” said Miss White. “ I will make the dressing first. Bring me a large plate, and the cruet-stand, and a spoon and fork, and some salt.”

Now when these things had been brought, and when Miss White had set about preparing this salad dressing in a highly

scientific manner, a strange thing occurred. Her sister seemed to have been attacked by a sudden fit of madness. She had caught up a light shawl, which she extended from hand to hand, as if she were dancing with some one, and then she proceeded to execute a slow waltz in this circumscribed space, humming the improvised music in a mystical and rhythmical manner. And what were these dark utterances that the inspired one gave forth, as she glanced from time to time at her sister and the plate?

"Oh, a Highland lad my love was born—and the Lowland laws he held in scorn—"

"Carry, don't make a fool of yourself!" said the other flushing angrily.

Carry flung her imaginary partner aside.

"There is no use making any pretence," said she, sharply. "You know quite well why you are making that salad dressing."

"Did you never see me make salad dressing before?" said the other, quite as sharply.

"You know it is simply because Sir Keith Macleod is coming to lunch. I forgot all about it. Oh, and that's why you had the clean curtains put up yesterday?"

What else had this precocious brain ferreted out?

"Yes, and that's why you bought papa a new necktie," continued the tormenter; and then she added, triumphantly, *"But he hasn't put it on this morning, ha—Gerty?"*

A calm and dignified silence is the best answer to the fiendishness of thirteen. Miss White went on with the making of the salad-dressing. She was considered very clever at it. Her father had taught her: but he never had the patience to carry out his own precepts. Besides, brute force is not wanted for the work: what you want is the self-denying assiduity and the dexterous light-handedness of a woman.

A smart young maid-servant, very trimly dressed, made her appearance.

"Sir Keith Macleod, miss," said she.

"Oh, Gerty, you're caught!" muttered the fiend.

But Miss White was equal to the occasion. The small white fingers plied the fork without a tremor.

"Ask him to step this way, please," she said.

And then the subtle imagination of this demon of thirteen jumped to another conclusion.

"Oh, Gerty, you want to show him that you are a good housekeeper—that you can make salad——"

But the imp was silenced by the appearance of Macleod himself. He looked tall as he came through the small drawing-room. When he came out onto the balcony the languid air of the place seemed to acquire a fresh and brisk vitality: he had a bright smile and a resonant voice.

"I have taken the liberty of bringing you a little present, Miss White—no, it is a large present—that reached me this morning," said he. "I want you to see one of our Highland salmon. He is a splendid fellow—twenty-six pounds four ounces, my landlady says. My cousin Janet sent him to me."

"Oh, but, Sir Keith, we cannot rob you," Miss White said, as she still demurely plied her fork. "If there is any special virtue in a Highland salmon, it will be best appreciated by yourself, rather than by those who don't know."

"The fact is," said he, "people are so kind to me that I scarcely ever am allowed to dine at my lodgings; and you know the salmon should be cooked at once."

Miss Carry had been making a face behind his back to annoy her sister. She now came forward and said, with a charming innocence in her eyes:—

"I don't think you can have it cooked for luncheon, Gerty, for that would look too much like bringing your tea in your pocket, and getting hot water for twopence. Wouldn't it?"

Macleod turned and regarded this new-comer with an unmistakable "Who is this?"—*Co an so?*—in his air.

"Oh, that is my sister Carry, Sir Keith," said Miss White. "I forgot you had not seen her."

"How do you do?" said he, in a kindly way; and for a second he put his hand on the light curls as her father might have done. "I suppose you like having holidays?"

From that moment she became his deadly enemy. To be patted on the head, as if she were a child, an infant—and that in the presence of the sister-whom she had just been lecturing.

"Yes, thank you," said she, with a splendid dignity, as she proudly walked off. She went into the small lobby leading to the door. She called to the little maid-servant. She looked at a certain long bag made of matting which lay there, some bits of grass sticking out of one end. "Jane, take this thing down to the cellar at once! The whole house smells of it."

Meanwhile Miss White had carried her salad dressing in

to Marie, and had gone out again to the veranda where Macleod was seated. He was charmed with the dreamy stillness and silence of the place, with the hanging foliage all around, and the colors in the steep gardens, and the still waters below.

"I don't see how it is," said he, "but you seem to have much more open houses here than we have. Our houses in the North look cold, and hard, and bare. We should laugh if we saw a place like this up with us; it seems to me a sort of a toy place out of a picture—from Switzerland or some such country. Here you are in the open air, with your own little world around you, and nobody to see you; you might live all your life here, and know nothing about the storm crossing the Atlantic, and the wars in Europe, if only you gave up the newspapers."

"Yes, it is very pretty and quiet," said she, and the small fingers pulled to pieces one of the rose leaves that Carry had thrown at her. "But you know one is never satisfied anywhere. If I were to tell you the longing I have to see the very places you describe as being so desolate—— But perhaps papa will take me there some day."

"I hope so," said he; "but I would not call them desolate. They are terrible at times, and they are lonely, and they make you think. But they are beautiful too, with a sort of splendid beauty and grandeur that goes very near making you miserable. . . . I cannot describe it. You will see for yourself."

Here a bell rang, and at the same moment Mr. White made his appearance.

"How do you do, Sir Keith? Luncheon is ready, my dear—luncheon is ready—luncheon is ready."

He kept muttering to himself as he led the way. They entered a small dining-room, and here, if Macleod had ever heard of actresses having little time to give to domestic affairs, he must have been struck by the exceeding neatness and brightness of everything on the table and around it. The snow-white cover; the brilliant glass and spoons; the carefully arranged, if tiny, bouquets; and the precision with which the smart little maiden-servant, the only attendant, waited—all these things showed a household well managed. Nay, this iced claret-cup—was it not of her own composition?—and a pleasanter beverage he had never drank.

But she seemed to pay little attention to these matters, for she kept glancing at her father, who, as he addressed

Macleod from time to time, was obviously nervous and harassed about something. At last she said,—

“Papa, what is the matter with you? Has anything gone wrong this morning?”

“Oh, my dear child,” said he, “don’t speak of it. It is my memory—I fear my memory is going. But we will not trouble our guest about it. I think you were saying, Sir Keith, that you had seen the latest additions to the National Gallery——”

“But what is it, papa?” his daughter insisted.

“My dear, my dear, I know I have the lines somewhere; and Lord —— says that the very first jug fired at the new pottery he is helping shall have these lines on it, and be kept for himself. I know I have both the Spanish original and the English translation somewhere; and all the morning I have been hunting and hunting—for only one line. I think I know the other three,—

‘Old wine to drink.
Old wrongs let sink.
* * * * *
Old friends in need.’

It is the third line that has escaped me—dear, dear me! I fear my brain is going.”

“But I will hunt for it, papa,” said she; “I will get the lines for you. Don’t you trouble.”

“No, no, no, child,” said he, with somewhat of a pompous air. “You have this new character to study. You must not allow any trouble to disturb the serenity of your mind while you are so engaged. You must give your heart and soul to it, Gerty; you must forget yourself; you must abandon yourself to it, and let it grow up in your mind until the conception is so perfect that there are no traces of the manner of its production left.”

He certainly was addressing his daughter, but somehow the formal phrases suggested that he was speaking for the benefit of the stranger. The prim old gentleman continued; “That is the only way. Art demands absolute self-forgetfulness. You must give yourself to it in complete surrender. People may not know the difference; but the true artist seeks only to be true to himself. You produce the perfect flower; they are not to know of the anxious care—of the agony of tears, perhaps you have spent on it. But then your

whole mind must be given to it ; there must be no distracting cares ; I will look for the missing lines myself."

"I am quite sure, papa," said Miss Carry, spitefully, "that she was far more anxious about these cutlets than about her new part this morning. She was half a dozen times to the kitchen. I didn't see her reading the book much."

"The *res angustæ domi*," said the father, sententiously, "sometimes interfere, where people are not too well off. But that is necessary. What is not necessary is that Gertry should take my troubles over to herself, and disturb her formation of this new character, which ought to be growing up in her mind almost insensibly, until she herself will scarcely be aware how real it is. When she steps on to the stage she ought to be no more Gertrude White than you or I. The artist loses himself. He transfers his soul to his creation. His heart beats in another breast ; he sees with other eyes. You will excuse me, Sir Keith. but I keep insisting on this point to my daughter. If she ever becomes a great artist, that will be the secret of her success. And she ought never to cease from cultivating the habit. She ought to be ready at any moment to project herself, as it were, into any character. She ought to practise so as to make of her own emotions an instrument that she can use at will. It is a great demand that art makes on the life of an artist. In fact, he ceases to live for himself. He becomes merely a medium. His most secret experiences are the property of the world at large, once they have been transfused and moulded by his personal skill."

And so he continued talking, apparently for the instruction of his daughter, but also giving his guest clearly to understand that Miss Gertrude White was not as other women but rather as one set apart for the high and inexorable sacrifice demanded by art. At the end of his lecture he abruptly asked Macleod if he had followed him. Yes, he had followed him, but in rather a bewildered way. Or had he some confused sense of self-reproach, in that he had distracted the contemplation of this pale and beautiful artist, and sent her downstairs to look after cutlets ?

"It seems a little hard, sir," said Macleod to the old man, "that an artist is not to have any life of his or her own at all ; that he or she should become merely a—a—a sort of ten-minutes' emotionalist."

It was not a bad phrase for a rude Highlander to have invented on the spur of the moment. But the fact was tha*

some little personal feeling stung him into the speech. He was prepared to resent this tyranny of art. And if he now were to see some beautiful pale slave bound in these iron chains, and being exhibited for the amusement of an idle world, what would the fierce blood of the Macleods say to that debasement? He began to dislike this old man, with his cruel theories and his oracular speech. But he forbore to have further or any argument with him; for he remembered what the Highlanders call "the advice of the bell of Scoon"—"*The thing that concerns you not meddle not with.*"

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRINCESS RIGHINN.

THE people who lived in this land of summer, and sunshine, and flowers—had they no cares at all? He went out into the garden with these two girls; and they were like two young fawns in their careless play. Miss Carry, indeed, seemed bent on tantalizing him by the manner in which she petted and teased and caressed her sister—scolding her, quarrelling with her, and kissing her all at once. The grave, gentle, forbearing manner in which the elder sister bore all this was beautiful to see. And then her sudden concern and pity when the wild Miss Carry had succeeded in scratching her finger with the thorn of a rose-bush! It was the tiniest of scratches: and all the blood that appeared was about the size of a pin-head. But Miss White must needs tear up her dainty little pocket-handkerchief, and bind that grievous wound, and condole with the poor victim as though she were suffering untold agonies. It was a pretty sort of idleness. It seemed to harmonize with this still, beautiful summer day, and the soft green foliage around, and the still air that was sweet with the scent of the flowers of the lime-trees. They say that the Gaelic word for the lower regions *ifrin*, is derived from *i-bhuirn*, the island of incessant rain. To a Highlander, therefore must not this land of perpetual summer and sunshine have seemed to be heaven itself?

And even the malicious Carry relented for a moment.

"You said you were going to the Zoological Gardens," she said.

"Yes," he answered, "I am. I have seen everything I want to see in London but that."

"Because Gerty and I might walk across the Park with you, and show you the way."

"I very much wish you would," said he, "if you have nothing better to do."

"I will see if papa does not want me," said Miss White, calmly. She might just as well be walking in Regent's Park as in this small garden.

Presently the three of them set out.

"I am glad of any excuse," she said, with a smile, "for throwing aside that new part. It seems to me insufferably stupid. It is very hard that you should be expected to make a character look natural when the words you have to speak are such as no human being would use in any circumstance whatever."

Oddly enough, he never heard her make even the slightest reference to her profession without experiencing a sharp twinge of annoyance. He did not stay to ask himself why this should be so. Ordinarily he simply made haste to change the subject.

"Then why should you take the part at all?" said he, bluntly.

"Once you have given yourself up to a particular calling—you must accept its little annoyances," she said, frankly. "I cannot have everything my own way. I have been very fortunate in other respects. I never had to go through the drudgery of the provinces, though they say that is the best school possible for an actress. And I am sure the money and the care papa has spent on my training—you see, he had no son to send to college. I think he is far more anxious about my succeeding than I am myself."

"But you have succeeded," said Macleod. It was, indeed, the least he could say, with all his dislike of the subject.

"Oh, I do not call that success," said she, simply. "That is merely pleasing people by showing them little scenes from their own drawing-rooms transferred to the stage. They like it because it is pretty and familiar. And people pretend to be very cynical at present—they like things with 'no nonsense about them ;' and I suppose this sort of comedy is the natural reaction from the rant of the melodrama. Still, if you happen to be ambitious—or perhaps it is mere vanity?—if you would like to try what is in you——"

"Gerty wants to be a Mrs. Siddons : that's it," said Miss Carry, promptly.

Talking to an actress about her profession, and not having a word of compliment to say? Instead, he praised the noble elms and chestnuts of the Park, the broad white lake, the flowers, the avenues. He was greatly interested by the whizzing by overhead of a brace of duck.

"I suppose you are very fond of animals?" Miss White said.

"I am indeed," said he, suddenly brightening up. "And up at our place I give them all a chance. I don't allow a single weasel or hawk to be killed, though I have a great deal of trouble about it. But what is the result? I don't know whether there is such a thing as the balance of nature, or whether it is merely that the hawks and weasels and other vermin kill off the sickly birds : but I do know that we have less disease among our birds than I hear of anywhere else. I have sometimes shot a weasel, it is true, when I have run across him as he was hunting a rabbit—you cannot help doing that if you hear the rabbit squealing with fright long before the weasel is at him—but it is against my rule. I give them all a fair field and no favor. But there are two animals I put out of the list ; I thought there was only one till this week—now there are two ; and one of them I hate, the other I fear."

"Fear?" she said : the slight flash of surprise in her eyes was eloquent enough. But he did not notice it.

"Yes," said he, rather gloomily. "I suppose it is superstition, or you may have it in your blood ; but the horror I have of the eyes of a snake—I cannot tell you of it. Perhaps I was frightened when I was a child—I cannot remember ; or perhaps it was the stories of the old women. The serpent is very mysterious to the people in the Highlands : they have stories of watersnakes in the lochs : and if you get a nest of seven adders with one white one, you boil the white one, and the man who drinks the broth knows all things in heaven and earth. In the Lewis they call the serpent *righinn*, that is, '*a princess* ;' and they say that the serpent is a princess bewitched. But that is from fear—it is a compliment——"

"But surely there are no serpents to be afraid of in the Highlands?" said Miss White. She was looking rather curiously at him.

"No," said he, in the same gloomy way. "The adders run away from you if you are walking through the heather.

If you tread on one, and he bites your boot, what then? He cannot hurt you. But suppose you are out after the deer, and you are crawling along the heather with your face to the ground, and all at once you see the two small eyes of an adder looking at you and close to you——”

He shuddered slightly—perhaps it was only an expression of disgust.

“I have heard,” he continued, “that in parts of Islay they used to be so bad that the farmers would set fire to the heather in a circle, and as the heather burned in and in you could see the snakes and adders twisting and curling in a great ball. We have not many with us. But one day John Begg, that is the schoolmaster, went behind a rock to get a light for his pipe; and he put his head close to the rock to be out of the wind; and then he thought he stirred something with his cap; and the next moment the adder fell on to his shoulder, and bit him in the neck. He was half mad with the fright; but I think the adder must have bitten the cap first and expended its poison; for the schoolmaster was only ill for about two days, and then there was no more of it. But just think of it—an adder getting to your neck——”

“I would rather not think of it,” she said, quickly. “What is the other animal—that you hate?”

“Oh!” he said, lightly, “that is a very different affair—that is a parrot that speaks. I was never shut up in the house with one till this week. My landlady’s son brought her home one from the West Indies; and she put the cage in a window recess on my landing. At first it was a little amusing; but the constant yelp—it was too much for me. ‘*Pritty poal / pritty poal!*’ I did not mind so much; but when the ugly brute, with its beady eyes and its black snout, used to yelp, ‘*Come and kis me / come and kis me!*’ I grew to hate it. And in the morning, too, how was one to sleep? I used to open my door and fling a boot at it; but that only served for a time. It began again.”

“But you speak of it as having been there. What became of it?”

He glanced at her rather nervously—like a schoolboy—and laughed.

“Shall I tell you?” he said, rather shamefacedly. “The murder will be out sooner or later. It was this morning. I could stand it no longer. I had thrown both my boots at it; it was no use. I got up a third time, and went out. The window, that looks into a back yard, was open. Then I

opened the parrot's cage. But the fool of an animal did not know what I meant—or it was afraid—and so I caught him by the back of the neck and flung him out. I don't know anything more about him."

"Could he fly?" said the big-eyed Carry, who had been quite interested in this tragic tale.

"I don't know," Macleod said, modestly. "There was no use asking him. All he could say was, '*Come and kiz me;*' and I got tired of that."

"Then you have murdered him!" said the elder sister in an awestricken voice; and she pretended to withdraw a bit from him. "I don't believe in the Macleods having become civilized, peaceable people. I believe they would have no hesitation in murdering any one that was in their way."

"Oh, Miss White," said he, in protest, "you must forget what I told you about the Macleods; and you must really believe they were no worse than the others of the same time. Now I was thinking of another story the other day, which I must tell you——"

"Oh, pray, don't," she said, "if it is one of those terrible legends——"

"But I must tell you," said he, "because it is about the Macdonalds; and I want to show you that we had not all the badness of those times. It was Donald Gorm Mor; and his nephew Hugh Macdonald, who was the heir to the chieftainship, he got a number of men to join him in a conspiracy to have his uncle murdered. The chief found it out, and forgave him. That was not like a Macleod," he admitted, "for I never heard of a Macleod of those days forgiving anybody. But again Hugh Macdonald engaged in a conspiracy; and then Donald Gorm Mor thought he would put an end to the nonsense. What did he do? He put his nephew into a deep and foul dungeon—so the story says—and left him without food or water for a whole day. Then there was salt beef lowered into the dungeon; and Macdonald he devoured the salt beef; for he was starving with hunger. Then they left him alone. But you can imagine the thirst of a man who has been eating salt beef, and who has had no water for a day or two. He was mad with thirst. Then they lowered a cup into the dungeon—you may imagine the eagerness with which the poor fellow saw it coming down to him—and how he caught it with both his hands. *But it was empty!* And so, having made a fool of him in that way, they left him to die of thirst. That was the Macdonalds, Miss White, not the Macleods."

"Then I am glad of Culloden," said she, with decision, "for destroying such a race of fiends."

"Oh, you must not say that," he protested, laughing. "We should have become quiet and respectable folks without Culloden. Even without Culloden we should have had penny newspapers all the same; and tourist boats from Oban to Iona. Indeed, you won't find quieter folks anywhere than the Macdonalds and Macleods are now."

"I don't know how far you are to be trusted," said she, pretending to look at him with some doubts.

Now they reached the gate of the gardens.

"Do let us go in, Gerty," said Miss Carry. "You know you always get hints for your dresses from the birds—you would never have thought of that flamingo pink and white if you had not been walking through here——"

"I will go in for a while if you like, Carry," said she; and certainly Macleod was nothing loath.

There were but few people in the Gardens on this afternoon, for all the world was up at the Eton and Harrow cricket-match at Lord's, and there was little visible of 'Arry and his pipe. Macleod began to show more than a school boy's delight over the wonders of this strange place. That he was exceedingly fond of animals—always barring the two he had mentioned—was soon abundantly shown. He talked to them as though the mute inquiring eyes could understand him thoroughly. When he came to animals with which he was familiar in the North, he seemed to be renewing acquaintance with old friends—like himself, they were strangers in a strange land.

"Ah," said he to the splendid red deer, which was walking about the paddock with his velvety horns held proudly in the air, "what part of the Highlands have you come from? And wouldn't you like now a canter down the dry bed of a stream on the side of Ben-an-Sloich?"

The hind, with slow and gentle step, and with her nut-brown hide shining in the sun, came up to the bars, and regarded him with those large, clear, gray-green eyes—so different from the soft dark eyes of the roe—that had long eyelashes on the upper lid. He rubbed her nose.

"And wouldn't you rather be up on the heather, munching the young grass and drinking out of the burn?"

They went along to the great cage of the sea-eagles. The birds seemed to pay no heed to what was passing immediately around them. Ever and anon they jerked their

heads into an attitude of attention, and the golden brown eye with its contracted pupil and stern upper lid, seemed to be throwing a keen glance over the immeasurable leagues of sea.

"Poor old chap!" he said to one perched high on an old stump, "wouldn't you like to have one sniff of a sea-breeze, and a look round for a sea-pyot or two? What do they give you here—dead fish, I suppose?"

The eagle raised its great wings and slowly flapped them once or twice, while it uttered a succession of shrill *yawps*.

"Oh yes," he said, "you could make yourself heard above the sound of the waves. And I think if any of the boys were after your eggs or your young ones, you could make short work of them with those big wings. Or would you like to have a battle-royal with a seal, and try whether you could pilot the seal in to the shore, or whether the seal would drag you and your fixed claws down to the bottom and drown you?"

There was a solitary kittiwake in a cage devoted to sea-birds, nearly all of which were foreigners.

"You poor little kittiwake," said he, "this is a sad place for you to be in. I think you would rather be out at Ru-Treshanish, even if it was blowing hard, and there was rain about. There was a dead whale came ashore there about a month ago; that would have been something like a feast for you."

"Why," said he, to his human companion, "if I had only known before! Whenever there was an hour or two with nothing to do, here was plenty of occupation. But I must not keep you too long, Miss White. I could remain here days and weeks."

"You will not go without looking in at the serpents," said she, with a slight smile.

He hesitated for a second.

"No," said he; "I think I will not go in to see them."

"But you must," said she, cruelly. "You will see they are not such terrible creatures when they are shut up in glass boxes."

He suffered himself to be led along to the reptile house; but he was silent. He entered the last of the three. He stood in the middle of the room, and looked around him in rather a strange way.

"Now, come and look at this splendid fellow," said Miss White, who, with her sister, was leaning over the rail. "Look

at his splendid bars of color ! do you see the beautiful blue sheen on its scales ? ”

It was a huge anaconda, its body as thick as a man's leg, lying coiled up in a circle ; its flat, ugly head reposing in the middle. He came a bit nearer. “ Hideous ! ” was all he said. And then his eyes was fixed on the eyes of the animal—the lidless eyes, with their perpetual glassy stare. He had thought at first they were closed ; but now he saw that that opaque yellow substance was covered by a glassy coating, while in the centre there was a small slit as if cut by a pen-knife. The great coils slowly expanded and fell again as the animal breathed ; otherwise the fixed stare of those yellow eyes might have been taken for the stare of death.

“ I don't think the anaconda is poisonous at all,” said she, lightly.

“ But if you were to meet that beast in a jungle,” said he, “ what difference would that make ! ”

He spoke reproachfully, as if she were luring him into some secret place to have him slain with poisonous fangs. He passed on from that case to the others unwillingly. The room was still. Most of the snakes would have seemed dead but for the malign stare of the beaded eyes. He seemed anxious to get out ; the atmosphere of the place was hot and oppressive.

But just at the door there was a case some quick motion in which caught his eye, and despite himself he stopped to look. The inside of this glass box was alive with snakes—raising their heads in the air, slimily crawling over each other, the small black forked tongues shooting in and out, the black points of eyes glassily staring. And the object that had moved quickly was a wretched little yellow frog, that was not motionless in a dish of water, its eyes apparently starting out of its head with horror. A snake made its appearance over the edge of the dish. The shooting black tongue approached the head of the frog ; and then the long, sinuous body glided along the edge of the dish again, the frog meanwhile being too paralyzed with fear to move. A second afterward the frog, apparently recovering, sprung clean out of the basin ; but it was only to alight on the backs of two or three of the reptiles lying coiled up together. It made another spring, and got into a corner among some grass. But along that side of the case another of those small, flat, yellow marked heads was slowly creeping along, propelled by the squirming body ; and again the frog made a sudden spring,

this time leaping once more into the shallow water, where, it stood and panted, with its eyes dilated. And now a snake that had crawled up the side of the case put out its long neck as if to see whither it should proceed. There was nothing to lay hold of. The head swayed and twisted, the forked tongue shooting out; and at last the snake fell away from its hold, and splashed right into the basin of water on the top of the frog. There was a wild shooting this way and that—but Macleod did not see the end of it. He had uttered some slight exclamation, and got into the open air, as one being suffocated: and there were drops of perspiration on his forehead, and a trembling of horror and disgust had seized him. His two companions followed him out.

“I felt rather faint,” said he, in a low voice—and he did not turn to look at them as he spoke—“the air is close in that room.”

They moved away. He looked around—at the beautiful green of the trees, and the blue sky, and the sunlight on the path—God’s world was getting to be more wholesome again, and the choking sensation of disgust was going from his throat. He seemed, however, rather anxious to get away from this place. There was a gate close by; he proposed they should go out by that. As he walked back with them to South Bank, they chatted about many of the animals—the two girls in especial being much interested in certain pheasants, whose colors of plumage they thought would look very pretty in a dress—but he never referred, either then or at any future time, to his visit to the reptile house. Nor did it occur to Miss White, in this idle conversation, to ask him whether his Highland blood had inherited any other qualities besides that instinctive and deadly horror of serpents.

CHAPTER X.

LAST NIGHTS.

“GOOD-NIGHT, Macleod!” — “Good-night!” — “Good-night!” The various voices came from the top of a drag. They were addressed to one of two young men who stood on the steps of the Star and Garter—black fingers in the blaze

of light. And now the people on the drag had finally ensconced themselves, and the ladies had drawn their ample cloaks more completely around their gay costumes, and the two grooms were ready to set free the heads of the leaders. "Good-night, Macleod!" Lord Beauregard called again; and then, with a little preliminary prancing of the leaders, away swung the big vehicle through the clear darkness of the sweet-scented summer night.

"It was awfully good-natured of Beauregard to bring six of your people down and take them back again," observed Lieutenant Ogilvie to his companion. "He wouldn't do it for most folks. He wouldn't do it for me. But then you have the grand air, Macleod. You seem to be conferring a favor when you get one."

"The people have been very kind to me," said Macleod, simply. "I do not know why. I wish I could take them all up to Castle Dare and entertain them as a prince could entertain people——"

"I want to talk to you about that, Macleod," said his companion. "Shall we go upstairs again? I have left my hat and coat there."

They went upstairs, and entered a long chamber which had been formed by the throwing of two rooms into one. The one apartment had been used as a sort of withdrawing room; in the other stood the long banquet-table, still covered with bright-colored flowers, and dishes of fruit, and decanters and glasses. Ogilvie sat down, lit a cigar, and poured himself out some claret.

"Macleod," said he, "I am going to talk to you like a father. I hear you have been going on in a mad way. Surely you know that a batchelor coming up to London for a season, and being asked about by people who are precious glad to get unmarried men to their houses, is not expected to give these swell dinner parties? And then, it seems, you have been bringing down all your people in drags. What do those flowers cost you? I dare say this is Lafitte, now?"

"And if it is, why not drink it and say no more about it? I think they enjoyed themselves pretty well this evening—don't you, Ogilvie?"

"Yes, yes; but then, my dear fellow, the cost! You will say it is none of my business; but what would your decent, respectable mother say to all this extravagance?"

"Ah?" said Macleod, "that is just the thing; I should have more pleasure in my little dinner parties if only the

mother and Janet were here to see. I think the table would look a good deal better if my mother was at the head of it. And the cost?—oh, I am only following out her instructions, She would not have people think that I was insensible to the kindness that has been shown me; and then we cannot ask all those good friends up to Castle Dare; it is an out-of-the-way place, and there are no flowers on the dining-table there."

He laughed as he looked at the beautiful things before him; they would look strange in the gaunt hall of Castle Dare.

"Why," said he, "I will tell you a secret, Oglivie. You know my cousin Janet—she is the kindest-hearted of all the women I know—and when I was coming away she gave me £2000, just in case I should need it."

"£2000!" exclaimed Oglivie. "Did she think you were going to buy Westminster Abbey during the course of your holidays?" And then he looked at the table before him, and a new idea seemed to strike him. "You don't mean to say, Macleod, that it is your cousin's money——"

Macleod's face flushed angrily. Had any other man made the suggestion, he would have received a tolerably sharp answer. But he only said to his old friend Oglivie,—

"No, no, Oglivie; we are not very rich folks; but we have not come to that yet. 'I'd sell my kilts, I'd sell my shoon,' as the song says, before I touched a farthing of Janet's money. But I had to take it from her so as not to offend her. It is wonderful, the anxiety and affection of women who live away out of the world like that. There was my mother, quite sure that something awful was going to happen to me, merely because I was going away for two or three months. And Janet—I suppose she knew that our family never was very good at saving money—she would have me take this little fortune of hers, just as if the old days were come back, and the son of the house was supposed to go to Paris to gamble away every penny."

"By the way, Macleod," said Oglivie, "you have never gone to Paris, as you intended."

"No," said he, trying to balance three nectarines one on the top of the other, "I have not gone to Paris. I have made enough friends in London. I have had plenty to occupy the time. And now, Oglivie," he added, brightly, "I am going in for my last frolic, before everybody has left London, and you must come to it, even if you have to

go down by your cold-meat train again. You know Miss Rawlinson; you have seen her at Mrs. Ross's, no doubt. Very well; I met her first when we went down to the Thames yacht race, and afterwards we became great friends; and the dear little old lady already looks on me as if I were her son. And do you know what her proposal is? That she is to give me up her house and garden for a garden party, and I am to ask my friends; and it is to be a dance as well, for we shall ask the people to have supper at eight o'clock or so; and then we shall have a marquee—and the garden all lighted up—do you see? It is one of the largest gardens on Campden Hill; and the colored lamps hung on the trees will make it look very fine; and we shall have a band to play music for the dancers——”

“It will cost you £200 or £300 at least,” said Oglivie, sharply.

“What then? You give your friends a pleasant evening, and you show them that you are not ungrateful,” said Macleod.

Oglivie began to ponder over this matter. The stories he had heard of Macleod's extravagant entertainments were true, then. Suddenly he looked up and said,—

“Is Miss White to be one of your guests?”

“I hope so,” said he. “The theatre will be closed at the end of this week.”

“I suppose you have been a good many times to the theatre.”

“To the Piccadilly Theatre?”

“Yes.”

“I have been only once to the Piccadilly Theatre—when you and I went together,” said Macleod, coldly; and they spoke no more of that matter.

By and by they thought they might as well smoke outside, and so they went down and out upon the high and walled terrace overlooking the broad valley of the Thames. And now the moon had arisen in the south, and the winding river showed a pale gray among the black woods, and there was a silvery light on the stone parapet on which they leaned their arms. The night was mild and soft and clear, there was an intense silence around, but they heard the faint sound of oars far away—some boating party getting home through the dark shadows of the river-side trees.

“It is a beautiful life you have here in the south,” Macleod said, after a time, “though I can imagine that the wo-

men enjoy it more than the men. It is natural for women to enjoy pretty colors, and flowers, and bright lights, and music; and I suppose it is the mild air that lets their eyes grow so big and clear. But the men—I should think they must get tired of doing nothing. They are rather melancholy, and their hands are white. I wonder they don't begin to hate Hyde Park, and kid gloves, and tight boots. Ogilvie," said he, suddenly, straightening himself up, "what do you say to the 12th? A few breathers over Ben-an-Sloich would put new lungs into you. I don't think you look quite so limp as most of the London men; but still you are not up to the mark. And then an occasional run out to Coll or Tiree in that old tub of ours, with a brisk sou'-wester blowing across—that would put some mettle into you. Mind you, you won't have any grand banquets at Castle Dare. I think it is hard on the poor old mother that she should have all the pinching, and none of the squandering; but women seem to have rather a liking for these sacrifices, and both she and Janet are very proud of the family name; I believe they would live on sea-weed for a year if only their representative in London could take Buckingham Palace for the season. And Hamish—don't you remember Hamish? —he will give you a hearty welcome to Dare, and he will tell you the truth about any salmon or stag you may kill, though he was never known to come within five pounds of the real weight of any big salmon I ever caught. Now then, what do you say?"

"Ah, it is all very well," said Lieutenant Ogilvie. "If we could all get what we want, there would scarcely be an officer in Aldershot Camp on the 12th of August. But I must say there are some capitally good fellows in our mess—and it isn't every one gets the chance you offer me—and there's none of the dog-in-the-manger feeling about them: in short. I do believe, Macleod, that I could get off for a week or so about the 20th."

"The 20th? So be it. Then you will have the blackcock added in."

"When do you leave?"

"On the 1st of August—the morning after my garden party. You must come to it, Ogilvie. Lady Beauregard has persuaded her husband to put off their going to Ireland for three days in order to come. And I have got old Admiral Maitland coming—with his stories of the press-gang, and of Nelson, and of the raids on the merchant-ships for officers for the navy. Did you know that Miss Rawlinson was

an old sweetheart of his? He knew her when she lived in Jamaica with her father—several centuries ago you would think, judging by their stories. Her father got £28,000 from the government when his slaves were emancipated. I wish I could get the old admiral up to Dare—he and the mother would have some stories to tell, I think. But you don't like long journeys at ninety-two."

He was in a pleasant and talkative humor, this bright-faced and stalwart young fellow, with his proud, fine features and his careless air. One could easily see how these old folks had made a sort of a pet of him. But while he went on with this desultory chatting about the various people whom he had met, and the friendly invitations he had received, and the hopes he had formed of renewing his acquaintanceship with this person and the next person, should chance bring him again to London soon, he never once mentioned the name of Miss Gertrude White, or referred to her family, or even to her public appearances, about which there was plenty of talk at this time. Yet Lieutenant Ogilvie, on his rare visits to London, had more than once heard Sir Keith Macleod's name mentioned in conjunction with that of the young actress whom society was pleased to regard with a special and unusual favor just then; and once or twice he, as Macleod's friend, had been archly questioned on the subject by some inquisitive lady, whose eyes asked more than her words. But Lieutenant Ogilvie was gravely discreet. He neither treated the matter with ridicule, nor, on the other hand, did he pretend to know more than he actually knew—which was literally nothing at all. For Macleod, who was, in ordinary circumstances, anything but a reserved or austere person, was on this subject strictly silent, evading questions with a proud and simple dignity that forbade the repetition of them. "*The thing that concerns you not, meddle not with:*" he observed the maxim himself, and expected others to do the like.

It was an early dinner they had had, after their stroll in Richmond Park, and it was a comparatively early train that Macleod and his friend now drove down to catch, after he had paid his bill. When they reached Waterloo Station it was not yet eleven o'clock; when he, having bade good-bye to Ogilvie, got to his rooms in Bury Street, it was but a few minutes after. He was joyfully welcomed by his faithful friend Oscar.

"You poor dog," said he, "here have we been enjoying

ourselves all the day, and you have been in prison. Come, shall we go for a run?"

Oscar jumped up on him with a whine of delight; he knew what that taking up of the hat again meant. And then there was a silent stealing downstairs, and a slight, pardonable bark of joy in the hall, and a wild dash into the freedom of the narrow street when the door was opened. Then Oscar moderated his transports, and kept pretty close to his master as together they began to wander through the desert wilds of London.

Piccadilly?—Oscar had grown as expert in avoiding the rattling broughams and hansom as the veriest mongrel that ever led a vagrant life in London streets. Berkeley Square?—here there was comparative quiet, with the gas lamps shining up on the thick foliage of the maples. In Grosvenor Square he had a bit of a scamper; but there was no rabbit to hunt. In Oxford Street his master took him into a public-house and gave him a biscuit and a drink of water; after that his spirits rose a bit, and he began to range ahead in Baker Street. But did Oscar know any more than his master why they had taken this direction?

Still farther north; and now there were a good many trees about; and the moon, high in the heavens, touched the trembling foliage, and shone white on the front of the houses. Oscar was a friendly companion; but he could not be expected to notice that his master glanced somewhat nervously along South Bank when he had reached the entrance to that thoroughfare. Apparently the place was quite deserted; there was nothing visible but the walls, trees, and houses, one side in black shadow, the other shining cold and pale in the moonlight. After a moment's hesitation Macleod resumed his walk, though he seemed to tread more softly.

And now, in the perfect silence, he neared a certain house, though but little of it was visible over the wall and through the trees. Did he expect to see a light in one of those upper windows, which the drooping acacias did not altogether conceal. He walked quickly by, with his head averted. Oscar had got a good way in front, not doubting that his master was following him.

But Macleod, perhaps having mustered up further courage, stopped in his walk, and returned. This time he passed more slowly, and turned his head to the house, as if listening. There was no light in the windows; there was no sound at all; there was no motion but that of the trembling acacia

leaves as the cold wind of the night stirred them. And then he passed over to the south side of the thoroughfare, and stood in the black shadow of a high wall; and Oscar came and looked up into his face.

A brougham rattled by; then there was utter stillness again; and the moonlight shone on the front of the small house, which was to all appearances as lifeless as the grave. Then, far away, twelve o'clock struck, and the sound seemed distant as the sound of a bell at sea in this intense quiet.

He was alone with the night, and with the dreams and fancies of the night. Would he, then, confess to himself that which he would confess to no other? Or was it merely some passing whim—some slight underchord of sentiment struck amidst the careless joy of a young man's holiday—that had led him up into the silent region of trees and moonlight? The scene around him was romantic enough, but he certainly had not the features of an anguish-stricken lover.

Again the silence of the night was broken by the rumbling of a cab that came along the road; and now, whatever may have been the fancy that brought him hither, he turned to leave, and Oscar joyfully bounded out into the road. But the cab, instead of continuing its route, stopped at the gate of the house he had been watching, and two young ladies stepped out. Fionaghal, the Fair Stranger, had not, then, been wandering in the enchanted land of dreams, but toiling home in a humble four-wheeler from the scene of her anxious labors? He would have slunk away rapidly but for an untoward accident. Oscar, ranging up and down, came upon an old friend, and instantly made acquaintance with her, on seeing which, Macleod, with deep vexation at his heart, but with a pleasant and careless face, had to walk along also.

"What an odd meeting!" said he. "I have been giving Oscar a run. I am glad to have a chance of bidding you good-night. You are not very tired, I hope."

"I am rather tired," said she; "but I have only two more nights, and then my holiday begins."

He shook hands with both sisters, and wished them good-night, and departed. As Miss Gertrude White went into her father's house she seemed rather grave.

"Gerty," said the younger sister, as she screwed up the gas, "wouldn't the name of Lady Macleod look well in a play-bill?"

The elder sister would not answer; but as she turned

away there was a quick flush of color in her face—whether caused by anger or by a sudden revelation of her own thought it was impossible to say.

CHAPTER XI.

A FLOWER.

THE many friends Macleod had made in the South—or rather those of them who had remained in town till the end of the season—showed an unwonted interest in this nondescript party of his ; and it was at a comparatively early hour in the evening that the various groups of people began to show themselves in Miss Rawlinson's garden. That prim old lady, with her quick, bright ways, and her humorous little speeches, studiously kept herself in the background. It was Sir Keith Macleod who was the host. And when he remarked to her that he thought the most beautiful night of all the beautiful time he had spent in the South had been reserved for this very party, she replied—looking round the garden just as if she had been one of his guests—that it was a pretty scene. And it was a pretty scene. The last fire of the sunset was just touching the topmost branches of the trees. In the colder shade below, the banks and beds of flowers and the costumes of the ladies acquired a strange intensity of color. Then there was a band playing, and a good deal of chatting going on, and one old gentleman with a grizzled mustache humbly receiving lessons in lawn tennis from an imperious small maiden of ten. Macleod was here, there, and everywhere. The lanterns were to be lit while the people were in at supper. Lieutenant Ogilvie was directed to take in Lady Beauregard when the time arrived.

"You must take her in yourself, Macleod," said that properly constituted youth. "If you outrage the sacred laws of precedence——"

"I mean to take Miss Rawlinson in to supper," said Macleod ; "she is the oldest woman here, and I think, my best friend."

"I thought you might wish to give Miss White the place of honor," said Ogilvie, out of sheer impertinence ; but Mac-

leod went off to order the candles to be lit in the marquee, where supper was laid.

By and by he came out again. And now the twilight had drawn on apace ; there was a cold, clear light in the skies, while at the same moment a red glow began to shine through the canvas of the long tent. He walked over to one little group who were seated on a garden chair.

"Well," said he, "I have got pretty nearly all my people together now, Mrs. Ross."

"But where is Gertrude White?" said Mrs. Ross; "surely she is to be here?"

"Oh yes, I think so," said he. "Her father and herself both promised to come. You know her holidays have begun now."

"It is a good thing for that girl," said Miss Rawlinson, in her quick, *staccato* fashion, "that she has few holidays. Very good thing she has her work to mind. The way people run after her would turn any woman's head. The Grand D—— is said to have declared that she was one of the three prettiest women he saw in England: what can you expect if things like that get to a girl's ears?"

"But you know Gerty is quite unspoiled," said Mrs. Ross, warmly.

"Yes, so far," said the old lady, "So far she retains the courtesy of being hypocritical."

"Oh, Miss Rawlinson, I won't have you say such things of Gerty White! Mrs. Ross protested. You are a wicked old woman—isn't she Hugh?"

"I am saying it to her credit," continued the old lady, with much composure. "What I say is, that most pretty women who are much run after are flattered into frankness. When they are introduced to you, they don't take the trouble to conceal that they are quite indifferent to you. A plain woman will be decently civil, and will smile, and pretend she is pleased. A beauty—a recognized beauty—doesn't take the trouble to be hypocritical. Now Miss White does."

"It is an odd sort of compliment," said Colonel Ross, laughing. "What do you think of it Macleod?"

"These are too great refinements for my comprehension," said he, modestly. "I think if a pretty woman is uncivil to you, it is easy for you to turn on your heel and go away."

"I did not say uncivil—don't you go misrepresenting a poor old woman, Sir Keith. I said she is most likely to be

flattered into being honest—into showing a stranger that she is quite indifferent, whereas a plain woman will try to make herself a little agreeable. Now a poor lone creature like myself likes to fancy that people are glad to see her, and Miss White pretends as much. It is very kind. By and by she will get spoiled like the rest, and then she will become honest. She will shake hands with me, and then turn off, as much as to say, 'Go away, you ugly old woman, for I can't be bothered with you, and I don't expect any money from you, and why should I pretend to like you?'

All this was said in a half-jesting way; and it certainly did not at all represent—so far as Macleod had ever made out—the real opinions of her neighbors in the world held by this really kind and gentle old lady. But Macleod had noticed before that Miss Rawlinson never spoke with any great warmth about Miss Gertrude White's beauty, or her acting, or anything at all connected with her. At this very moment, when she was apparently praising the young lady, there was a bitter flavor about what she said. There may be jealousy between sixty-five and nineteen; and if this reflection occurred to Macleod, he no doubt assumed that Miss Rawlinson, if jealous at all, was jealous of Miss Gertrude White's influence over—Mrs. Ross.

"As for Miss White's father," continued the old lady, with a little laugh, "perhaps he believes in those sublime theories of art he is always preaching about. Perhaps he does. They are very fine. One result of them is that his daughter remains on the stage—and earns a handsome income—and he enjoys himself in picking up bits of curiosities."

"Now that is really unfair," said Mrs. Ross, seriously. "Mr. White is not a rich man, but he has some small means that render him quite independent of any income of his daughter's. Why, how did they live before they ever thought of letting her try her fortune on the stage? And the money he spent, when it was at last decided she should be carefully taught——"

"Oh, very well," said Miss Rawlinson, with a smile; but she nodded her head ominously. If that old man was not actually living on his daughter's earnings, he had at least strangled his mother, or robbed the Bank of England, or done something or other. Miss Rawlinson was obviously not well disposed either to Mr. White or to his daughter.

At this very moment both these persons made their ap-

pearance, and certainly, as this slender and graceful figure, clad in a pale summer costume, came across the lawn, and as a smile of recognition lit up the intelligent fine face, these critics sitting there must have acknowledged that Gertrude White was a singularly pretty woman. And then the fascination of that low-toned voice! She began to explain to Macleod why they were so late: some trifling accident had happened to Carry. But as these simple, pathetic tones told him the story, his heart was filled with a great gentleness and pity towards that poor victim of misfortune. He was struck with remorse because he had sometimes thought harshly of the poor child on account of a mere occasional bit of perverseness. His first message from the Highlands would be to her,

“O, Willie brew’d a peck o’ maut,”

the band played merrily, as the gay company took their seats at the long banquet-table, Macleod leading in the prim old dame who had placed her house at his disposal. There was a blaze of light and color in this spacious marquee. Bands of scarlet took the place of oaken rafters; there were huge blocks of ice on the table, each set in a miniature lake that was filled with white water-lilies; there were masses of flowers and fruit from one end to the other; and by the side of each *menu* lay a tiny nosegay, in the centre of which was a sprig of bell-heather. This last was a notion of Macleod’s amiable hostess; she had made up those miniature bouquets herself. But she had been forestalled in the pretty compliment. Macleod had not seen much of Miss Gertrude White in the cold twilight outside. Now, in this blaze of yellow light, he turned his eyes to her, as she sat there demurely flirting with an old admiral of ninety-two, who was one of Macleod’s special friends. And what was that flower she wore in her bosom—the sole piece of color in the costume of white? That was no sprig of blood-red bell-heather, but a bit of real heather—of the common ling; and it was set amidst a few leaves of juniper. Now, the juniper is the badge of the Clan Macleod. She wore it next her heart.

There was laughter, and wine, and merry talking.

“Last May a braw wooer,”

the band played now; but they scarcely listened.

“Where is your piper, Sir Keith?” said Lady Beauregard.

"At this moment," said he, "I should not wonder if he was down at the shore, waiting for me."

"You are going away quite soon, then?"

"To-morrow. But I don't wish to speak of it. I should like to-night to last forever."

Lady Beauregard was interrupted by her neighbor.

"What has pleased you, then, so much?" said his hostess, looking up at him. "London? Or the people in it? Or any one person in it?"

"Oh," he said, laughingly, "the whole thing. What is the use of dissecting? It is nothing but holiday making in this place. Now, Miss Rawlinson, are you brave? Won't you challenge the admiral to drink a glass of wine with you? And you must include his companion—just as they do at the city dinners—and I will join you too."

And so these old sweethearts drank to each other. And Macleod raised his glass too; and Miss White lowered her eyes, and perhaps flushed a little as she touched hers with her lips, for she had not often been asked to take a part in this old-fashioned ceremony. But that was not the only custom they revived that evening. After the banquet was over, and the ladies had got some light shawls and gone out into the mild summer night, and when the long marquee was cleared, and the band installed at the farther end, then there was a murmured talk of a minuet. Who could dance it? Should they try it?

"You know it?" said Macleod to Miss White.

"Yes," said she looking down.

"Will you be my partner?"

"With pleasure," she answered, but there was some little surprise in her voice which he at once detected.

"Oh," said he, "the mother taught me when I was a child. She and I used to have grand dances together. And Hamish he taught me the sword-dance."

"Do you know the sword-dance?" she said.

"Any one can know it," said he; "it is more difficult to do it. But at one time I could dance it with four of the thickest handled dirks instead of the two swords."

"I hope you will show us your skill to-night," she said, with a smile.

"Do you think any one can dance the sword-dance without the pipes?" said he, quite simply.

And now some of the younger people had made bold to try this minuet, and Macleod led his partner up to the head

of the improvised ball-room, and the slow and graceful music began. That was a pretty sight for those walking outside in the garden. So warm was the night that the canvas of one side of the marquee had been removed, and those walking about in the dark outside could look into this gayly lighted place with the beautifully colored figures moving to the slow music. And as they thus walked along the gravel-paths, or under the trees, the stems of which were decorated with spirals of colored lamps, a new light arose in the south to shed a further magic over the scene. Almost red at first, the full moon cleared as it rose, until the trees and bushes were touched with a silver radiance, and the few people who walked about threw black shadows on the greensward and gravel. In an arbor at the farthest end of the garden a number of Chinese lanterns shed a dim colored light on a table and a few rocking-chairs. There were cigarettes on the table.

By and by from out of the brilliancy of the tent stepped Macleod and Fionaghal herself, she leaning on his arm, a light scarf thrown round her neck. She uttered a slight cry of surprise when she saw the picture this garden presented—the colored cups on the trees, the swinging lanterns, the broader sheen of the moonlight spreading over the foliage, and the lawn, and the walks.

“It is like fairyland!” she said.

They walked along the winding gravel-paths; and now that some familiar quadrille was being danced in that brilliant tent, there were fewer people out here in the moonlight.

“I should begin to believe that romance was possible,” she said, with a smile, “if I often saw a beautiful scene like this. It is what we try to get in the theatre; but I see all the bare boards and the lime light—I don’t have a chance of believing in it.”

“Do you have a chance of believing in anything,” said he, “on the stage?”

“I don’t understand you,” she said, gently; for she was sure he would not mean the rudeness that his words literally conveyed.

“And perhaps I cannot explain,” said he. “But—but your father was talking the other day about your giving yourself up altogether to your art—living the lives of other people for the time being, forgetting yourself, sacrificing yourself, having no life of your own but that. What must the

end of it be? — that you play with emotions and beliefs until you have no faith in any one—none left for yourself; it is only the material of your art. Would you not rather like to live your own life?”

He had spoken rather hesitatingly, and he was not at all sure that he had quite conveyed to her his meaning, though he had thought over the subject long enough and often enough to get his own impressions of it clear.

If she had been ten years older, and an experienced coquette, she would have said to herself, “*This man hates the stage because he is jealous of its hold on my life,*” and she would have rejoiced over the inadvertent confession. But now these hesitating words of his seemed to have awakened some quick responsive thrill in her nature, for she suddenly said, with an earnestness that was not at all assumed:

“Sometimes I have thought of that—it is so strange to hear my own doubts repeated. If I could choose my own life—yes, I would rather live that out than merely imagining the experiences of others. But what is one to do? You look around, and take the world as it is. Can anything be more trivial and disappointing? When you are Juliet in the balcony, or Rosalind in the forest, then you have some better feeling with you, if it is only for an hour or so.”

“Yes,” said he; “and you go on indulging in those doses of fictitious sentiment until—— But I am afraid the night air is too cold for you. Shall we go back?”

She could not fail to notice the trace of bitterness, and subsequent coldness, with which he spoke. She knew that he must have been thinking deeply over this matter, and that it was no ordinary thing that caused him to speak with so much feeling. But, of course, when he proposed that they should return to the marquee, she consented. He could not expect her to stand there and defend her whole manner of life. Much less could he expect her to give up her profession merely because he had exercised his wits in getting up some fantastic theory about it. And she began to think that he had no right to talk to her in this bitter fashion.

When they had got half way back to the tent, he paused for a moment.

“I am going to ask a favor of you,” he said, in a low voice. “I have spent a pleasant time in England, and I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you for letting me become one of your friends. To-morrow morning I am going

back home. I should like you to give me that flower—as some little token of remembrance.”

The small fingers did not tremble at all as she took the flower from her dress. She presented it to him with a charming smile and without a word. What was the giving of a flower? There was a cart-load of roses in the tent.

But this flower she had worn next her heart.

CHAPTER XII.

WHITE HEATHER.

AND now behold ! the red flag flying from the summit of Castle Dare—a spot of brilliant color in this world of whirling mist and flashing sunlight. For there is half a gale blowing in from the Atlantic, and gusty clouds come sweeping over the islands, so that now the Dutchman, and now Fladda, and now Ulva disappears from sight, and then emerges into the sunlight again, dripping and shining after the bath, while ever and anon the huge promontory of Ru-Treshanish shows a gloomy purple far in the north. But the wind and the weather may do what they like to-day ; for has not the word just come down from the hill that the smoke of the steamer has been made out in the south ? and old Hamish is flying this way and that, fairly at his wits' end with excitement ; and Janet Macleod has cast a last look at the decorations of heather and juniper in the great hall ; while Lady Macleod, dressed in the most stately fashion, has declared that she is as able as the youngest of them to walk down to the point to welcome home her son.

“ Ay, your leddyship, it is very bad,” complains the distracted Hamish. “ that it will be so rough a day this day, and Sir Keith not to come ashore in his own gig, but in a fishing-boat, and to come ashore at the fishing quay, too ; but it is his own men will go out for him, and not the fishermen at all, though I am sure they will hef a dram whatever when Sir Keith comes ashore. And will you not tek the pony, your leddyship ? for it is a long road to the quay.”

“ No, I will not take the pony, Hamish,” said the tall, white-haired dame, “ and it is not of much consequence what

boat Sir Keith has, so long as he comes back to us. And now I think you had better go down to the quay yourself, and see that the cart is waiting and the boat ready."

But how could old Hamish go down to the quay? He was in his own person skipper, head keeper, steward, butler, and general major-domo, and ought on such a day as this to have been in half a dozen places at once. From the earliest morning he had been hurrying hither and thither, in his impatience making use of much voluble Gaelic. He had seen the yacht's crew in their new jersies. He had been round the kennels. He had got out a couple of bottles of the best claret that Castle Dare could afford. He had his master's letters arranged on the library table, and had given a final rub to the guns and rifles on the rack. He had even been down to the quay, swearing at the salmon-fishers for having so much lumber lying about the place where Sir Keith Macleod was to land. And if he was to go down to the quay now, how could he be sure that the ancient Christiana, who was mistress of the kitchen as far as her husband Hamish would allow her to be, would remember all his instructions? And then the little granddaughter Christiana, would she remember her part in the ceremony?

However, as Hamish could not be in six places at once, he decided to obey his mistress's directions, and went hurriedly off to the quay, overtaking on his way Donald the piper lad, who was apparelled in all his professional finery.

"And if ever you put wind in your pipes, you will put wind in your pipes this day, Donald," said he to the red-haired lad. "And I will tell you now what you will play when you come ashore from the steamer: it is the 'Farewell to Chubraltar' you will play."

"The 'Farewell to Gibraltar!' said Donald, peevishly, for he was bound in honor to let no man interfere with his proper business. "It is a better march than that I will play, Hamish. It is the 'Heights of Alma,' that was made by Mr. Ross, the Queen's own piper; and will you tell me that the 'Heights of Alma' is not a better march than the 'Farewell to Gibraltar?'"

Hamish pretended to pay no heed to this impertinent boy. His eye was fixed on a distant black speck that was becoming more and more pronounced out there amidst the grays and greens of the windy and sunlit sea. Occasionally it disappeared altogether, as a cloud of rain swept across toward the giant cliffs of Mull, and then again it would appear,

sharper and blacker than ever, while the masts and funnel were now visible as well as the hull. When Donald and his companion got down to the quay, they found the men already in the big boat, getting ready to hoist the huge brown lugsail; and there was a good deal of laughing and talking going on, perhaps in anticipation of the dram they were sure to get when their master returned to Castle Dare. Donald jumped down on the rude stone ballast, and made his way up to the bow; Hamish, who remained on shore, helped to shove her off; then the heavy lugsail was quickly hoisted, the sheet hauled tight; and presently the broad-beamed boat was ploughing its way through the rushing seas, with an occasional cloud of spray coming right over her from stem to stern. "Fhir a bhata," the men sung, until Donald struck in with his pipes, and the wild skirl of "The Barren Rocks of Aden" was a fitter sort of music to go with these sweeping winds and plunging seas.

And now we will board the steamer, where Keith Macleod is up on the bridge, occasionally using a glass, and again talking to the captain, who is beside him. First of all on board he had caught sight of the red flag floating over Castle Dare; and his heart had leaped up at that sign of welcome. Then he could make out the dark figures on the quay, and the hoisting of the lugsail, and the putting off of the boat. It was not a good day for observing things, for heavy clouds were quickly passing over, followed by bewildering gleams of a sort of watery sunlight; but as it happened, one of these sudden flashes chanced to light up a small plateau on the side of the hill above the quarry, just as the glass was directed on that point. Surely—surely—these two figures?

"Why, it is the mother—and Janet!" he cried.

He hastily gave the glass to his companion.

"Look!" said he. "Don't you think that is Lady Macleod and my cousin? What could have tempted the old lady to come away down there on such a squally day?"

"Oh yes, I think it is the ladies," said the captain; and then he added, with a friendly smile, "and I think it is to see you all the sooner, Sir Keith, that they have come down to the shore."

"Then," said he, "I must go down and get my gillie, and show him his future home."

He went below the hurricane deck to a corner in which Oscar was chained up. Beside the dog, sitting on a campstool, and wrapped round with a tartan plaid, was the person

whom Macleod had doubtless referred to as his gillie. He was not a distinguished-looking attendant to be travelling with a Highland chieftain.

"Johnny, my man, come on deck now, and I will show you where you are going to live. You're all right now, aren't you? And you will be on the solid land again in about ten minutes."

Macleod's gillie rose—or, rather, got down—from the campstool, and showed himself to be a miserable, emaciated child of ten or eleven, with a perfectly colorless face, frightened gray eyes, and starved white hands. The contrast between the bronzed and bearded sailors—who were now hurrying about to receive the boat from Dare—and this pallid and shrunken scrap of humanity was striking; and when Macleod took his hand, and half led and half carried him up on deck, the look of terror that he directed on the plunging waters all around showed that he had not had much experience of the sea. Involuntarily he had grasped hold of Macleod's coat as if for protection.

"Now, Johnny, look right ahead. Do you see the big house on the cliffs over yonder?"

The child, still clinging on to his protector, looked all round with the dull, pale eyes, and at length said,—

"No."

"Can't you see that house, poor chap? Well, do you see that boat over there? You must be able to see that."

"Yes, sir."

"That boat is to take you ashore. You needn't be afraid. If you don't like to look at the sea, get down into the bottom of the boat, and take Oscar with you, and you'll see nothing until you are ashore. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come along, then."

For now the wild skirl of Donald's pipes was plainly audible; and the various packages—the new rifle, the wooden case containing the wonderful dresses for Lady Macleod and her niece, and what not—were all ranged ready; to say nothing of some loaves of white bread that the steward was sending ashore at Hamish's request. And then the heaving boat came close to, her sail hauled down; and a rope was thrown and caught; and then there was a hazardous scrambling down the dripping iron steps, and a notable spring on the part of Oscar, who had escaped from the hands of the sailors. As for the new gillie, he resembled nothing so much as a limp

bunch of clothes, as Macleod's men, wondering not a little, caught him up and passed him astern. Then the rope was thrown off, the steamer steamed slowly ahead, the lugsail was run up again, and away the boat plunged for the shore, with Donald playing the "Heights of Alma" as though he would rend the skies.

"Hold your noise, Donald!" his master called to him. "You will have plenty of time to play the pipes in the evening."

For he was greatly delighted to be among his own people again; and he was eager in his questions of the men as to all that had happened in his absence; and it was no small thing to them that Sir Keith Macleod should remember their affairs, too, and ask after their families and friends. Donald's loyalty was stronger than his professional pride. He was not offended that he had been silenced; he only bottled up his musical fervor all the more; and at length, as he neared the land, and knew that Lady Macleod and Miss Macleod were within hearing, he took it that he knew better than any one else what was proper to the occasion, and once more the proud and stirring march strove with the sound of the hurrying waves. Nor was that all. The piper lad was doing his best. Never before had he put such fire into his work; but as they got close inshore the joy in his heart got altogether the mastery of him, and away he broke into the mad delight of "Lady Mary Ramsay's Reel." Hamish on the quay heard, and he strutted about as if he were himself playing, and that before the Queen. And then he heard another sound—that of Macleod's voice:

"*Stand by lads! . . . Down with her!*"—and the flapping sail, with its swinging gaff, rattled down into the boat. At the same moment Oscar made a clear spring into the water, gained the landing-steps, and dashed upward—dripping as he was—to two ladies who were standing on the quay above. And Janet Macleod so far forgot what was due to her best gown that she caught his head in her arms, as he pawed and whined with delight.

That was a glad enough party that started off and up the hillside for Castle Dare. Janet Macleod did not care to conceal that she had been crying a little bit; and there were proud tears in the eyes of the stately old dame who walked with her; but the most excited of all was Hamish, who could by no means be got to understand that his master did not all at once want to hear about the trial of the young setters.

and the price of the sheep sold the week before at Tobermory, and the stag that was chased by the Carsaig men on Tuesday.

"Confound it, Hamish!" Macleod said, laughing, "leave all those things till after dinner."

"Oh, ay, oh ay, Sir Keith, we will hef plenty of time after dinner," said Hamish, just as if he were one of the party, but very nervously working with the ends of his thumbs all the time, "and I will tell you of the fine big stag that has been coming down every night—every night, as I am a living man—to Mrs. Murdoch's corn; and I wass saying to her, 'Just hold your tongue, Mrs. Murdoch'—that wass what I will say to her—'just hold your tongue, Mrs. Murdoch, and be a civil woman, for a day or two days, and when Sir Keitn comes home it iss no more at all the stag will trouble you—oh no, no more at all; there will be no more trouble about the stag when Sir Keith comes home.'"

And old Hamish laughed at his own wit, but it was in a sort of excited way.

"Look here, Hamish, I want you to do this for me," Macleod said; and instantly the face of the old man—it was a fine face, too, with its aquiline nose, and grizzled hair, and keen hawk-like eyes—was full of an eager attention. "Go back and fetch that little boy I left with Donald. You had better look after him yourself. I don't think any water came over him; but give him dry clothes if he is wet at all. And feed him up: the little beggar will take a lot of fattening without any harm."

"Where is he to go to?" said Hamish, doubtfully.

"You are to make a keeper of him. When you have fattened him up a bit, teach him to feed the dogs. When he gets bigger, he can clean the guns."

"I will let no man or boy clean the guns for you but myself, Sir Keith," the old man said, quite simply, and without a shadow of disrespect, "I will hef no risks of the kind."

"Very well, then; but go and get the boy, and make him at home as much as you can. Feed him up."

"Who is it, Keith?" his cousin said, "that you are speaking of as if he was a sheep or a calf?"

"Faith," said he, laughing, "if the philanthropists heard of it, they would prosecute me for slave-stealing. I bought the boy—for a sovereign,"

"I think you have made a bad bargain, Keith," his

mother said ; but she was quite prepared to hear of some absurd whim of his.

"Well," said he, "I was going into Trafalgar Square, where the National Gallery of pictures is, mother, and there is a cab-stand in the street, and there was a cabman standing there, munching at a lump of dry bread that he cut with a jack-knife. I never saw a cabman do that before ; I should have been less surprised if he had been having a chicken and a bottle of port. However, in front of this big cabman this little chap I have brought with me was standing ; quite in rags ; no shoes on his feet, no cap on his wild hair ; and he was looking fixedly at the big lump of bread. I never saw any animal look so starved and so hungry ; his eyes were quite glazed with the fascination of seeing the man ploughing away at this lump of loaf. And I never saw any child so thin. His hands were like the claws of a bird ; and his trousers were short and torn so that you could see his legs were like two pipe-stems. At last the cabman saw him. 'Get out o' the way,' says he. The little chap slunk off, frightened, I suppose. Then the man changed his mind. 'Come here,' says he. But the little chap was frightened, and wouldn't come back ; so he went after him, and thrust the loaf into his hand, and bade him be off. I can tell you, the way he went into that loaf was very fine to see. It was like a weasel at the neck of a rabbit. It was like an otter at the back of a salmon. And that was how I made his acquaintance," Macleod added, carelessly.

"But you have not told us why you brought him up here," his mother said.

"Oh," said he, with a sort of laugh, "I was looking at him, and I wondered whether Highland mutton and Highland air would make any difference in the wretched little skeleton ; and so I made his acquaintance. I went home with him to a fearful place—I have got the address, but I did not know there were such quarters in London—and I saw his mother. The poor woman was very ill, and she had a lot of children ; and she seemed quite glad when I offered to take this one and make a herd or a gamekeeper of him. I promised he should go to visit her once a year, that she might see whether there was any difference. And I gave her a sovereign."

"You were quite right, Keith," his cousin said, gravely ; "You run a great risk. Do they hang slavers ?"

"Mother," said he, for by this time the ladies were stand

ing still, so that Hamish and the new gillie should overtake them, "you mustn't laugh at the little chap when you see him with the plaid taken off. The fact is, I took him to a shop in the neighborhood to get some clothes for him, but I couldn't get anything small enough. He *does* look ridiculous; but you mustn't laugh at him, for he is like a girl for sensitiveness. But when he has been fed up a bit, and got some Highland air into his lungs, his own mother won't know him. And you will get him some other clothes, Janet—some kilts, maybe—when his legs get stronger."

Whatever Keith Macleod did was sure to be right in his mother's eyes, and she only said, with a laugh,—

"Well, Keith, you are not like your brothers. When they brought me home presents, it was pretty things; but all your curiosities, wherever you go, are the halt, and the lame, and the blind; so that people laugh at you, and say that Castle Dare is becoming the hospital of Mull."

"Mother, I don't care what the people say."

"And indeed I know that," she answered.

Their waiting had allowed Hamish and the new gillie to overtake them; and certainly the latter, deprived of his plaid, presented a sufficiently ridiculous appearance in the trousers and jacket that were obviously too big for him. But neither Lady Macleod nor Janet laughed at all when they saw this starved London waif before them.

"Johnny," said Macleod, "here are two ladies who will be very kind to you, so you needn't be afraid to live here."

But Johnny did look mortally afraid, and instinctively once more took hold of Macleod's coat. Then he seemed to have some notion of his duty. He drew back one foot, and made a sort of courtesy. Probably he had seen girls do this, in mock-heroic fashion, in some London court.

"And are you very tired?" said Janet Macleod, in that soft voice of hers that all children loved.

"Yes," said the child.

"Kott bless me!" cried Hamish, "I did not know that!"—and therewith the old man caught up Johnny Wickes as if he had been a bit of ribbon, and flung him on to his shoulder, and marched off to Castle Dare.

Then the three Macleods continued on their way—through the damp-smelling fir-wood; over the bridge that spanned the brawling brook; again through the fir-wood; until they reached the open space surrounding the big stone house. They stood for a minute there—high over the great

plain of the sea, that was beautiful with a thousand tints of light. And there was the green island of Ulva, and there the darker rocks of Colonsay, and farther out, amidst the windy vapor and sunlight, Lunga, and Fladda, and the Dutchman's Cap, changing in their hue every minute as the clouds came driving over the sea.

"Mother," said he, "I have not tasted fresh air since I left. I am not sorry to get back to Dare."

"And I don't think we are sorry to see you back, Keith," his cousin said, modestly.

And yet the manner of his welcome was not imposing they are not very good at grand ceremonies on the western shores of Mull. It is true that Donald, relieved of the care of Johnny Wickes, had sped by a short-cut through the fir-wood, and was now standing in the gravelled space outside the house, playing the "Heights of Alma" with a spirit worthy of all the MacCruimins that ever lived. But as for the ceremony of welcome, this was all there was of it: When Keith Macleod went up to the hall door, he found a small girl of five or six standing quite by herself at the open entrance. This was Christina, the grand-daughter of Hamish, a pretty little girl with wide blue eyes and yellow hair.

"Halloo, Christina," said Macleod, "won't you let me into the house?"

"This is for you, Sir Keith," said she, in the Gaelic, and she presented him with a beautiful bunch of white heather. Now white heather, in that part of the country, is known to bring great good fortune to the possessor of it.

"And it is a good omen," said he, lightly, as he took the child up and kissed her. And that was the manner of his welcome to Castle Dare.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT HOME.

THE two women-folk, with whom he was most nearly brought into contact, were quite convinced that his stay in London had in nowise altered the buoyant humor and brisk activity of Keith Macleod. Castle Dare awoke into a new life on his return. He was all about and over the place

accompanied by the faithful Hamish ; and he had a friendly word and smile for every one he met. He was a good master : perhaps he was none the less liked because it was pretty well understood that he meant to be master. His good-nature had nothing of weakness in it. "If you love me, I love you," says the Gaelic proverb ; "*otherwise do not come near me.*" There was not a man or lad about the place who would not have adventured his life for Macleod ; but all the same they were well aware that the handsome young master, who seemed to go through life with a merry laugh on his face, was not one to be trifled with. This John Fraser, an Aberdeen man, discovered on the second night after Macleod's return to Castle Dare.

Macleod had the salmon-fishing on this part of the coast, and had a boat's crew of four men engaged in the work. One of these having fallen sick, Hamish had to hire a new hand, an Aberdeenshire man, who joined the crew just before Macleod's departure from London. This Fraser turned out to be a "dour" man ; and his discontent and grumbling seemed to be affecting the others, so that the domestic peace of Dare was threatened. On the night in question old Hamish came into Macleod's conjoint library and gun-room.

"The fishermen hef been asking me again, sir," observed Hamish, with his cap in his hand. "What will I say to them ?"

"Oh, about the wages ?" Macleod said, turning round.

"Ay, sir."

"Well, Hamish, I don't object. Tell them that what they say is right. This year has been a very good year ; we have made some money ; I will give them two shillings a week more if they like. But then, look here, Hamish—if they have their wages raised in a good year, they must have them lowered in a bad year. They cannot expect to share the profit without sharing the loss too. Do you understand that, Hamish ?"

"Yes, Sir Keith, I think I do."

"Do you think you could put it into good Gaelic for them ?"

"Oh ay."

"Then tell them to choose for themselves. But make it clear."

"Ay, Sir Keith," said Hamish. "And if it was not for that — man, John Fraser, there would be no word of this thing. And there is another thing I will hef to speak to you

about, Sir Keith; and it is John Fraser, too, who is at the bottom of this, I will know that fine. It is more than two or three times that you will warn the men not to bathe in the bay below the castle; and not for many a day will any one do that, for the Cave bay it is not more as half a mile away. And when you were in London, Sir Keith, it was this man John Fraser he would bathe in the bay below the castle in the morning, and he got one or two of the others to join him; and when I bade him go away, he will say that the sea belongs to no man. And this morning, too——”

“This morning!” Macleod said, jumping to his feet. There was an angry flash in his eyes.

“Ay, sir, this very morning I saw two of them myself—and John Fraser he was one of them—and I went down and said to them, ‘It will be a bad day for you,’ says I to them, ‘if Sir Keith will find you in this bay.’”

“Are they down at the quay now?” Macleod said.

“Ay, they will be in the house now.”

“Come along with me, Hamish. I think we will put this right.”

He lifted his cap and went out into the cool night air, followed by Hamish. They passed through the dark fir-wood until they came in sight of the Atlantic again, which was smooth enough to show the troubled reflection of the bigger stars. They went down the hillside until they were close to the shore, and then they followed the rough path to the quay. The door of the square stone building was open; the men were seated on rude stools or on spare coils of rope, smoking. Macleod called them out, and they came to the door.

“Now look here, boys,” said he, “you know I will not allow any man to bathe in the bay before the house. I told you before; I tell you now for the last time. They that want to bathe can go along to the Cave bay; and the end of it is this—and there will be no more words about it—that the first man I catch in the bay before the house I will take a horse-whip to him, and he will have as good a run as ever he had in his life.”

With that he was turning away, when he heard one of the men mutter, “*I would like to see you do it!*” He wheeled round instantly—and if some of his London friends could have seen the look of his face at this moment, they might have altered their opinion about the obliteration of certain qualities from the temperament of the Highlanders of our own day.

"Who said that?" he exclaimed.

There was no answer.

"Come out here, you four men!" he said. "Stand in a line there. Now let the man who said that step out and face me. I will show him who is to be master here. If he thinks he can master me, well; but it is one or the other of us who will be master!"

There was not a sound or a motion; but Macleod sprang forward, caught the man Fraser by the throat, and shook him thrice—as he might have shaken a reed.

"You scoundrel!" he said. "You coward! Are you afraid to own it was you? There has been nothing but bad feeling since ever you brought your ugly face among us—well, we've had enough of you!"

He flung him back.

"Hamish," said he, "you will pay this man his month's wages to-night. Pack him off with the Gometra men in the morning; they will take him out to the *Pioneer*. And look you here, sir," he added, turning to Fraser, "it will be a bad day for you the day that I see your face again anywhere about Castle Dare."

He walked off and up to the house again, followed by the reluctant Hamish. Hamish had spoken of this matter only that Macleod should give the men a renewed warning; he had no notion that this act of vengeance would be the result. And where were they to get a man to put in Fraser's place?

It was about an hour later that Hamish again came into the room.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he, "but the men are outside."

"I cannot see them."

"They are ferry sorry, sir, about the whole matter, and there will be no more bathing in the front of the house, and the man Fraser they hef brought him up to say he is ferry sorry too."

"They have brought him up?"

"Ay, sir," said Hamish, with a grave smile. "It was for fighting him they were one after the other because he will make a bad speech to you; and he could not fight three men one after the other; and so they hef made him come up to say he is ferry sorry too; and will you let him stay on to the end of the season?"

"No. Tell the men that if they will behave themselves, we can go on as we did before, in peace and friendliness; but I

mean to be master in this place. And I will not have a sulky fellow like this Fraser stirring up quarrels. He must pack and be off."

"It will not be easy to get another man, Sir Keith," old Hamish ventured to say.

"Get Sandy over from the *Umpire*."

"But surely you will want the yacht, sir, when Mr. Ogilvie comes to Dare?"

"I tell you Hamish, that I will not have that fellow about the place. That is an end of it. Did you think it was only a threat that I meant? And have you not heard the old saying that 'one does not apply plaster to a threat?' You will send him to Gometra in the morning in time for the boat."

And so the sentence of banishment was confirmed; and Hamish got a young fellow from Ulva to take the place of Fraser; and from that time to the end of the fishing season perfect peace and harmony prevailed between master and men.

But if Lady Macleod and Janet saw no change whatever in Macleod's manner after his return from the South, Hamish, who was more alone with the young man, did. Why this strange indifference to the very occupations that used to be the chief interest of his life? He would not go out after the deer; the velvet would be on their horns yet. He would not go out after the grouse: what was the use of disturbing them before Mr. Ogilvie came up?

"I am in no hurry," he said, almost petulantly. "Shall I not have to be here the whole winter for the shooting? — and Hamish was amazed to hear him talk of the winter shooting as some compulsory duty, whereas in these parts it far exceeded in variety and interest the very limited low-ground shooting of the autumn. Until young Ogilvie came up, Macleod never had a gun in his hand. He had gone fishing two or three days; but had generally ended by surrendering his rod to Hamish, and going for a walk up the glen, alone. The only thing he seemed to care about, in the way of out of door occupation, was the procuring of otter-skins; and every man and boy in his service was ordered to keep a sharp lookout on that stormy coast for the prince of fur-bearing animals. Years before he had got enough skins together for a jacket for his cousin Janet; and that garment of beautiful thick black fur—dyed black, of course—was as silken and rich as when it was made. Why should he forget his own theory of

letting all animals have a chance in urging a war of extermination against the otter?

This preoccupation of mind, of which Hamish was alone observant, was nearly inflicting a cruel injury on Hamish himself. On the morning of the day on which Ogilvie was expected to arrive, Hamish went in to his master's library. Macleod had been reading a book, but he had pushed it aside, and now both his elbows were on the table, and he was leaning his head on his hands, apparently in deep meditation of some kind or other.

"Will I tek the bandage off Nell's foot now, sir?"

"Oh yes, if you like. You know as much as I do about it."

"Oh, I am quite sure," said Hamish, brightly, "that she will do ferry well to-morrow. I will tek her whatever; and I can send her home if it is too much for her."

Macleod took up his book again.

"Very well, Hamish. But you have plenty to do about the house. Duncan and Sandy can go with us to-morrow."

The old man started, and looked at his master for a second. Then he said, "Ferry well, sir," in a low voice, and left the room.

But for the hurt, and the wounded, and the sorrowful there was always one refuge of consolation in Castle Dare. Hamish went straight to Janet Macleod; and she was astonished to see the emotion of which the keen, hard, handsome face of the old man was capable. Who before had ever seen tears in the eyes of Hamish MacIntyre?

"And perhaps it is so," said Hamish, with his head hanging down, "and perhaps it is that I am an old man now, and not able any more to go up to the hills; but if I am not able 'or that, I am not able for anything; and I will not ask Sir Keith to keep me about the house, or about the yacht. It is younger men will do better as me; and I can go away to Greenock; and if it is an old man I am, maybe I will find a place in a smack, for all that——"

"Oh, nonsense, Hamish!" Janet Macleod said, with her kindly eyes bent on him. "You may be sure Sir Keith did not mean anything like that——"

"Ay, mem," said the old man, proudly, "and who wass it that first put a gun into his hand? and who wass it skinned the ferry first seal that he shot in Loch Scridain? and who wass it told him the name of every spar and sheet of the *Um-fire*, and showed him how to hold a tiller? And if there is

any man knows more as me about the birds and the deer, that is right—let him go out ; but it is the first day I hef not been out with Sir Keith since ever I wass at Castle Dare ; and now it is time that I am going away ; for I am an old man ; and the younger men they will be better on the hills, and in the yacht too. But I can make my living whatever.”

“Hamish, you are speaking like a foolish man,” said Janet Macleod to him. “You will wait here now till I go to Sir Keith.”

She went to him.

“Keith,” said she, “do you know that you have nearly broken old Hamish’s heart ?”

“What is the matter ?” said he, looking up in wonder.

“He says you have told him he is not to go out to the shooting with you to-morrow ; and that is the first time he has been superseded ; and he takes it that you think he is an old man ; and he talks of going away to Greenock to join a smack.”

“Oh, nonsense !” Macleod said. “I was not thinking when I told him. He may come with us if he likes. At the same time, Janet, I should think Norman Ogilvie will laugh at seeing the butler come out as a keeper.”

“You know quite well, Keith,” said his cousin, “that Hamish is no more a butler than he is captain of the *Umpire* or clerk of the accounts. Hamish is simply everybody and everything at Castle Dare. And if you speak of Norman Ogilvie—well, I think it would be more like yourself, Keith, to consult the feelings of an old man rather than the opinions of a young one.”

“You are always on the right side, Janet. Tell Hamish I am very sorry. I meant him no disrespect. And he may call me at one in the morning if he likes. He never looked on me but as a bit of his various machinery for killing things.”

“That is not fair of you, Keith. Old Hamish would give his right hand to save you the scratch of a thorn.”

She went off to cheer the old man, and he turned to his book. But it was not to read it ; it was only to stare at the outside of it in an absent sort of way. The fact is, he had found in it the story of a young aid-de-camp who was intrusted with a message to a distant part of the field while a battle was going forward, and who in mere bravado rode across a part of the ground open to the enemy’s fire. He came back laughing. He had been hit, he confessed, but he had escaped ; and he carelessly shook a drop or two of blood from

a flesh wound on his hand. Suddenly, however, he turned pale, wavered a little, and then fell forward on his horse's neck, a corpse.

Macleod was thinking about this story rather gloomily. But at last he got up with a more cheerful air, and seized his cap.

"And if it is my death-wound I have got," he was thinking to himself, as he set out for the boat that was waiting for him at the shore, "I will not cry out too soon."

CHAPTER XIV

A FRIEND.

His death-wound! There was but little suggestion of any death-wound about the manner or speech of this light-hearted and frank-spoken fellow who now welcomed his old friend Ogilvie ashore. He swung the gun-case into the cart as if it had been a bit of thread. He himself would carry Ogilvie's top-coat over his arm.

"And why have you not come in your hunting tartan?" said he, observing the very precise and correct shooting costume of the young man.

"Not likely," said Mr. Ogilvie, laughing. "I don't like walking through clouds with bare knees, with a chance of sitting down on an adder or two. And I'll tell you what it is, Macleod; if the morning is wet, I will not go out stalking, if all the stags in Christendom were there. I know what it is; I have had enough of it in my younger days."

"My dear fellow," Macleod said, seriously, "you must not talk here as if you could do what you liked. It is not what you wish to do, or what you don't wish to do; it is what Hamish orders to have done. Do you think I would dare to tell Hamish what we must do to-morrow?"

"Very well, then, I will see Hamish myself; I dare say he remembers me."

And he did see Hamish that evening, and it was arranged between them that if the morning looked threatening, they

would leave the deer alone, and would merely take the lower-lying moors in the immediate neighborhood of Castle Dare. Hamish took great care to impress on the young man that Macleod had not yet taken a gun in his hand, merely that there should be a decent bit of shooting when his guest arrived.

"And he will say to me, only yesterday," observed Hamish, confidentially—"it wass yesterday itself he wass saying to me, 'Hamish, when Mr. Ogilvie comes here, it will be only six days or seven days he will be able to stop, and you will try to get him two or three stags. And, Hamish'—this is what he will say to me—'you will pay no heed to me, for I hef plenty of the shooting whatever, from the one year's end to the other year's end, and it is Mr. Ogilvie you will look after.' And you do not mind the rain, sir? It is fine warm clothes you have got on—fine woollen clothes you have, and what harm will a shower do?"

"Oh, I don't mind the rain, so long as I can keep moving—that's the fact, Hamish," replied Mr. Ogilvie; "but I don't like lying in wet heather for an hour at a stretch. And I don't care how few birds there are, there will be plenty to keep us walking. So you remember me, after all, Hamish?"

"Oh ay, sir," said Hamish, with a demure twinkle in his eye. "I mind fine the time you will fall into the water off the rock in Loch na Keal."

"There, now," exclaimed Mr. Ogilvie. "That is precisely what I don't see the fun of doing, now that I have got to man's estate, and have a wholesome fear of killing myself. Do you think I would lie down now on wet sea-weed, and get slowly soaked through with the rain for a whole hour, on the chance of a seal coming on the other side of the rock? Of course when I tried to get up I was as stiff as a stone. I could not have lifted the rifle if a hundred seals had been there. And it was no wonder at all I slipped down into the water."

"But the sea-water," said Hamish, gravely; "there will no harm come to you of the sea-water."

"I want to have as little as possible of either sea-water or rain-water," said Mr. Ogilvie, with decision, "I believe Macleod is half an otter himself."

Hamish did not like this, but he only said, respectfully.

"I do not think Sir Keith is afraid of a shower of rain whatever."

These gloomy anticipations were surely uncalled for; for during the whole of the past week the Western Isles had

basked in uninterrupted sunlight, with blue skies over the fair blue seas, and a resinous warmth exhaling from the lonely moors. But all the same, next morning broke as if Mr. Ogilvie's forebodings were only too likely to be realized. The sea was leaden-hued and apparently still, though the booming of the Atlantic swell into the great caverns could be heard; Staffa, and Lunga, and the Dutchman were of a dismal black; the brighter colors of Ulva and Colonsay seemed coldly gray and green; and heavy banks of cloud lay along the land, running out to Ru-Treshanish. The noise of the stream rushing down through the fir-wood close to the castle seemed louder than usual, as if rain had fallen during the night. It was rather cold, too: all that Lady Macleod and Janet could say failed to raise the spirits of their guest.

But when Macleod—dressed in his homespun tartan of yellow and black—came round from the kennels with the dogs, and Hamish, and the tall red-headed lad Sandy, it appeared that they considered this to be rather a fine day than otherwise, and were eager to be off.

"Come along, Ogilvie," Macleod cried, as he gave his friend's gun to Sandy, but shouldered his own. "Sorry we haven't a dog-cart to drive you to the moor, but it is not far off."

"I think a cigar in the library would be the best thing for a morning like this," said Ogilvie, rather gloomily, as he put up the collar of his shooting-jacket, for a drop or two of rain had fallen.

"Nonsense, man! the first bird you kill will cheer you up."

Macleod was right; they had just passed through the wood of young larches close to Castle Dare, and were ascending a rough stone road that led by the side of a deep glen, when a sudden whir close by them startled the silence of this gloomy morning. In an instant Macleod had whipped his gun from his shoulder and thrust it into Ogilvie's hands. By the time the young man had full-cocked the right barrel and taken a quick aim, the bird was half way across the valley; but all the same he fired. For another second the bird continued its flight, but in a slightly irregular fashion; then down it went like a stone into the heather on the opposite side of the chasm.

"Well done, sir!" cried old Hamish.

"Bravo!" called out Macleod.

"It was a grand long shot!" said Sandy, as he unslipped

the sagacious old retriever, and sent her down into the glen.

They had scarcely spoken when another dark object, looking to the startled eye as if it were the size of a house, sprang from the heather close by, and went off like an arrow, uttering a succession of sharp crowings. Why did not he fire? Then they saw him in wild despair whip down the gun, full-cock the left barrel, and put it up again. The bird was just disappearing over a crest of rising ground, and as Ogilvie fired he disappeared altogether.

"He's down, sir!" cried Hamish, in great excitement.

"I don't think so," Ogilvie answered, with a doubtful air on his face, but with a bright gladness in his eyes all the same.

"He's down, sir," Hamish reasserted. "Come away Sandy, with the dog!" he shouted to the red-headed lad, who had gone down into the glen to help Nell in her researches. By this time they saw that Sandy was recrossing the burn with the grouse in his hand, Nell following him contentedly. They whistled, and again whistled; but Nell considered that her task had been accomplished, and alternately looked at them and up at her immediate master. However, the tall lad, probably considering that the whistling was meant as much for him as for the retriever, sprang up the side of the glen in a miraculous fashion, catching here and there by a bunch of heather or the stump of a young larch, and presently he had rejoined the party.

"Take time, sir," said he. "Take time. Maybe there is more of them about here. And the other one, I marked him down from the other side. We will get him ferry well."

They found nothing, however, until they had got to the other side of the hill, where Nell speedily made herself mistress of the other bird—a fine young cock grouse, plump and in splendid plumage.

"And what do you think of the morning now, Ogilvie?" Macleod asked.

"Oh, I dare say it will clear," said he, shyly; and he endeavored to make light of Hamish's assertions that they were "ferry pretty shots—ferry good shots; and it was always a right thing to put cartridges in the barrels at the door of a house, for no one could tell what might be close to the house; and he was sure that Mr. Ogilvie had not forgotten the use of a gun since he went away from the hills to live in England."

"But look here, Macleod," Mr. Ogilvie said; "why did

not you fire yourself?"—he was very properly surprised; for the most generous and self-denying of men are apt to claim their rights when a grouse gets up to their side.

"Oh," said Macleod simply, "I wanted you to have a shot."

And indeed all through the day he was obviously far more concerned about Ogilvie's shooting than his own. He took all the hardest work on himself—taking the outside beat, for example, if there was a bit of unpromising ground to be got over. When one or other of the dogs suddenly showed by its uplifted fore-paw, its rigid tail, and its slow, cautious, timid look round for help and encouragement, that there was something ahead of more importance than a lark, Macleod would run all the risks of waiting to give Ogilvie time to come up. If a hare ran across with any chance of coming within shot of Ogilvie, Macleod let her go by unscathed. And the young gentleman from the South knew enough about shooting to understand how he was being favored both by his host and—what was a more unlikely thing—by Hamish.

He was shooting very well, too; and his spirits rose and rose until the lowering day was forgotten altogether.

"We are in for a soaker this time!" he cried, quite cheerfully, looking around at one moment.

All this lonely world of olive greens and browns had grown strangely dark. Even the hum of flies—the only sound audible in these high solitudes away from the sea—seemed stilled; and a cold wind began to blow over from Ben-an-Sloich. The plain of the valley in front of them began to fade from view; then they found themselves enveloped in a clammy fog, that settled on their clothes and hung about their eyelids and beard, while water began to run down the barrels of their guns. The wind blew harder and harder: presently they seemed to spring out of the darkness; and, turning, they found that the cloud had swept onward toward the sea, leaving the rocks on the nearest hill-side all glittering wet in the brief burst of sunlight. It was but a glimmer. Heavier clouds came sweeping over; downright rain began to pour. But Ogilvie kept manfully to his work. He climbed over the stone walls, gripping on with his wet hands. He splashed through the boggy land, paying no attention to his footsteps. And at last he got to following Macleod's plan of crossing a burn, which was merely to wade through the foaming brown water instead of looking out for big stones. By this time the letters in his breast pocket were a mass of pulp

"Look here, Macleod," said he, with the rain running down his face, "I can't tell the difference between one bird and another, If I shoot a partridge it isn't my fault."

"All right," said Macleod. "If a partridge is fool enough to be up here, it deserves it."

Just at this moment Mr. Ogilvie suddenly threw up his hands and his gun, as if to protect his face. An extraordinary object—a winged object, apparently without a tail, a whirring bunch of loose gray feathers, a creature resembling no known fowl—had been put up by one of the dogs, and it had flown direct at Ogilvie's head. It passed him at about half a yard's distance.

"What in all the world is that?" he cried, jumping round to have a look at it.

"Why," said Macleod, who was roaring with laughter, "it is a baby blackcock, just out of the shell, I should think,"

A sudden noise behind him caused him to wheel round, and instinctively he put up his gun. He took it down again.

"That is the old hen," said he; "we'll leave her to look after her chicks. Hamish, get in the dogs, or they'll be for eating some of those young ones. And you, Sandy, where was it you left the basket? We will go for our splendid banquet now, Ogilvie."

That was an odd-looking party that by and by might have been seen crouching under the lee of a stone wall with a small brook running by their feet. They had taken down wet stones for seats; and these were somewhat insecurely fixed on the steep bank. But neither the rain, nor the gloom, nor the loneliness of the silent moors seemed to have damped their spirits much.

"It really is awfully kind of you, Ogilvie," Macleod said, as he threw half a sandwich to the old black retriever, "to take pity on a solitary fellow like myself. You can't tell how glad I was to see you on the bridge of the steamer. And now that you have taken all the trouble to come to this place, and have taken your chance of our poor shooting, this is the sort of day you get!"

"My dear fellow," said Mr. Ogilvie, who did not refuse to have his tumbler replenished by the attentive Hamish, "it is quite the other way. I consider myself precious lucky. I consider the shooting first-rate; and it isn't every fellow would deliberately hand the whole thing over to his friend, as you have been doing all day. And I suppose bad weather is as bad elsewhere as it is here."

Macleod was carelessly filling his pipe, and obviously thinking of something very different.

"Man, Ogilvie," he said, in a burst of confidence, "I never knew before how fearfully lonely a life we lead here. If we were out on one of the Treshanish Islands, with nothing round us but skarts and gulls, we could scarcely be lonelier. And I have been thinking all the morning what this must look like to you."

He glanced round—at the sombre browns and greens of the solitary moorland, at the black rocks jutting out here and there from the scant grass, at the silent and gloomy hills and the overhanging clouds.

"I have been thinking of the beautiful places we saw in London, and the crowds of people, the constant change, and amusement, and life. And I shouldn't wonder if you packed up your traps to-morrow morning and fled."

"My dear boy," observed Mr. Ogilvie, confidently, "you are giving me credit for a vast amount of sentiment. I haven't got it. I don't know what it is. But I know when I am jolly well off. I know when I am in good quarters, with good shooting, and with a good sort of chap to go about with. As for London—bah! I rather think you got your eyes dazzled for a minute, Macleod. You weren't long enough there to find it out. And wouldn't you get precious tired of big dinners, and garden-parties, and all that stuff, after a time? Macleod, do you mean to tell me you ever saw anything at Lady Beauregard's as fine as *that*?"

And he pointed to a goodly show of birds, with a hare or two, that Sandy had taken out of the bag, so as to count them.

"Of course," said this wise young man, "there is one case in which that London life is all very well. If a man is awful spoons on a girl, then, of course, he can trot after her from house to house, and walk his feet off in the Park. I remember a fellow saying a very clever thing about the reasons that took a man into society. What was it, now? Let me see. It was either to look out for a wife, or—or——"

Mr. Ogilvie was trying to recollect the epigram and to light a wax match at the same time, and he failed in both.

"Well," said he, "I won't spoil it; but don't you believe that any one you met in London wouldn't be precious glad to change places with us at this moment?"

Any one? What was the situation? Pouring rain, leaden skies, the gloomy solitude of the high moors, the sound of

roaring waters. And here they were crouching under a stone wall, with their dripping fingers lighting match after match for their damp pipes, with not a few midges in the moist and clammy air, and with a faint halo of steam plainly arising from the leather of their boots. When Fionaghal the Fair Stranger came from over the blue seas to her new home, was this the picture of Highland life that was presented to her?

"Lady Beauregard, for example?" said Macleod.

"Oh, I am not talking about women," observed the sagacious boy; "I never could make out a woman's notions about any thing. I dare say they like London life well enough, for they can show off their shoulders and their diamonds."

"Ogilvie," Macleod said, with a sudden earnestness, "I am fretting my heart out here—that is the fact. If it were not for the poor old mother—and Janet—but I will tell you another time."

He got up on his feet, and took his gun from Sandy. His companion—wondering not a little, but saying nothing—did likewise. Was this the man who had always seemed rather proud of his hard life on the hills? who had regarded the idleness and effeminacy of town life with something of an unexpressed scorn? A young fellow in robust health and splendid spirits—an eager sportsman and an accurate shot—out for his first shooting-day of the year: was it intelligible that he should be visited by vague sentimental regrets for London drawing-rooms and vapid talk? The getting up of a snipe interrupted these speculations; Ogilvie blazed away, missing with both barrels; Macleod, who had been patiently waiting to see the effect of the shots, then put up his gun, and presently the bird came tumbling down, some fifty yards off.

"You haven't warmed to it yet," Macleod said, charitably. "The first half hour after luncheon a man always shoots badly."

"Especially when his clothes are glued to his skin from head to foot," said Ogilvie.

"You will soon walk some heat into yourself."

And again they went on, Macleod pursuing the same tactics, so that his companion had the cream of the shooting. Despite the continued soaking rain, Ogilvie's spirits seemed to become more and more buoyant. He was shooting capitally; one very long shot he made, bringing down an old

blackcock with a thump on the heather, causing Hamish to exclaim,—

“Well done, sir! It is a glass of whiskey you will deserve for that shot.”

Whereupon Mr. Ogilvie stopped and modestly hinted that he would accept of at least a moiety of the proffered reward.

“Do you know, Hamish,” said he, “that it is the greatest comfort in the world to get wet right through, for you know you can’t be worse, and it gives you no trouble.”

“And a whole glass will do you no harm, sir,” shrewdly observed Hamish.

“Not in the clouds.”

“The what, sir?”

“The clouds. Don’t you consider we are going shooting through clouds?”

“There will be a snipe or two down here, sir,” said Hamish, moving on; for he could not understand conundrums, especially conundrums in English.

The day remained of this moist character to the end; but they had plenty of sport, and they had a heavy bag on their return to Castle Dare. Macleod was rather silent on the way home. Ogilvie was still at a loss to know why his friend should have taken this sudden dislike to living in a place he had lived in all his life. Nor could he understand why Macleod should have deliberately surrendered to him the chance of bagging the brace of grouse that got up by the side of the road. It was scarcely, he considered, within the possibilities of human nature.

CHAPTER XV.

A CONFESSION.

AND once again the big dining-hall of Castle Dare was ablaze with candles; and Janet was there, gravely listening to the garrulous talk of the boy-officer; and Keith Macleod, in his dress tartan; and the noble-looking old lady at the head of the table, who more than once expressed to her guest, in that sweetly modulated and gracious voice of hers,

how sorry she was he had encountered so bad a day for the first day of his visit.

"It is different with Keith," said she, "for he is used to be out in all weathers. He has been brought up to live out of doors.

"But you know, auntie," said Janet Macleod, "a soldier is much of the same thing. Did you ever hear of a soldier with an umbrella?"

"All I know is," remarked Mr. Ogilvie—who, in his smart evening dress, and with his face flushed into a rosy warmth after the cold and the wet, did not look particularly miserable—"that I don't remember ever enjoying myself so much in one day. But the fact is, Lady Macleod, your son gave me all the shooting; and Hamish was sounding my praises all day long, so that I almost got to think I could shoot the birds without putting up the gun at all; and when I made a frightful bad miss, everybody declared the bird was dead round the other side of the hill."

"And indeed you were not making many misses," Macleod said. "But we will try your nerve, Ogilvie, with a stag or two, I hope."

"I am on for anything. What with Hamish's flattery and the luck I had to-day, I begin to believe I could bag a brace of tigers if they were coming at me fifty miles an hour."

Dinner over, and Donald having played his best (no doubt he had learned that the stranger was an officer in the Ninety-third), the ladies left the dining-hall, and presently Macleod proposed to his friend that they should go into the library and have a smoke. Ogilvie was nothing loath. They went into the odd little room, with its guns and rods and stuffed birds, and, lying prominently on the writing-table, a valuable little heap of dressed otter-skins. Although the night was scarcely cold enough to demand it, there was a log of wood burning in the fireplace; there were two easy-chairs, low and roomy; and on the mantelpiece were some glasses, and a big black broad-bottomed bottle, such as used to carry the still vintages of Champagne even into the remote wilds of the Highlands, before the art of making sparkling wines had been discovered. Mr. Ogilvie lit a cigar, stretched out his feet towards the blazing log, and rubbed his hands, which were not as white as usual.

"You are a lucky fellow, Macleod," said he, "and you don't know it. You have everything about you here to make life enjoyable."

"And I feel like a slave tied to a galley oar," said he, quickly. "I try to hide it from the mother—for it would break her heart—and from Janet too; but every morning I rise, the dismalness of being alone here—of being caged up alone—eats more and more into my heart. When I look at you, Ogilvie—to-morrow morning you could go spinning off to any quarter you liked, to see any one you wanted to see —"

"Macleod," said his companion, looking up, and yet speaking rather slowly and timidly, "if I were to say what would naturally occur to any one—you won't be offended? What you have been telling me is absurd, unnatural, impossible, unless there is a woman in the case."

"And what then?" Macleod said, quickly, as he regarded his friend with a watchful eye, "You have guessed?"

"Yes," said the other: "Gertrude White."

Macleod was silent for a second or two. Then he sat down.

"I scarcely care who knows it now," said he, absently "so long as I can't fight it out of my own mind. I tried not to know it. I tried not to believe it. I argued with myself, laughed at myself, invented a hundred explanations of this cruel thing that was gnawing at my heart and giving me no peace night or day. Why, man, Ogilvie, I have read 'Pendennis!' Would you think it possible that any one who has read 'Pendennis' could ever fall in love with an actress?"

He jumped to his feet again, walked up and down for a second or two, twisting the while a bit of casting-line round his finger so that it threatened to cut into the flesh.

"But I will tell you now, Ogilvie—now that I am speaking to any one about it," said he—and he spoke in a rapid, deep, earnest voice, obviously not caring much what his companion might think, so that he could relieve his overburdened mind—"that it was not any actress I fell in love with. I never saw her in a theatre but that once. I hated the theatre whenever I thought of her in it. I dared scarcely open a newspaper, lest I should see her name. I turned away from the posters in the streets: when I happened by some accident to see her publicly paraded that way, I shuddered all through—with shame, I think; and I got to look on her father as a sort of devil that had been allowed to drive about that beautiful creature in vile chains. Oh, I cannot tell you! When I have heard him talking away in that infernal, cold, precise way about her duties to her art, and

insisting that she should have no sentiments or feelings of her own, and that she should simply use every emotion as a bit of something to impose on the public—a bit of her trade, an exposure of her own feelings to make people clap their hands—I have sat still and wondered at myself that I did not jump up and catch him by the throat, and shake the life out of his miserable body.”

“You have cut your hand, Macleod.”

He shook a drop or two of blood off.

“Why, Ogilvie, when I saw you on the bridge of the steamer, I nearly went mad with delight. I said to myself, ‘Here is some one who has seen her and spoken to her, who will know when I tell him.’ And now that I am telling you of it, Ogilvie, you will see—you will understand—that it is not any actress I have fallen in love with—it was not the fascination of an actress at all, but the fascination of the woman herself; the fascination of her voice, and her sweet ways, and the very way she walked, too, and the tenderness of her heart. There was a sort of wonder about her; whatever she did or said was so beautiful, and simple, and sweet! And day after day I said to myself that my interest in this beautiful woman was nothing. Some one told me there had been rumors: I laughed. Could any one suppose I was going to play Pendennis over again? And then as the time came for me to leave, I was glad, and I was miserable at the same time. I despised myself for being miserable. And then I said to myself, ‘This stupid misery is only the fancy of a boy. Wait till you get back to Castle Dare, and the rough seas, and the hard work of the stalking. There is no sickness and sentiment on the side of Ben-an-Sloich.’ And so I was glad to come to Castle Dare, and to see the old mother, and Janet, and Hamish; and the sound of the pipes, Ogilvie—when I heard them away in the steamer, that brought tears to my eyes; and I said to myself, ‘Now you are at home again, and there will be no more nonsense of idle thinking.’ And what has it come to? I would give everything I possess in the world to see her face once more—ay, to be in the same town where she is. I read the papers, trying to find out where she is. Morning and night it is the same—a fire, burning and burning, of impatience, and misery, and a craving just to see her face and hear her speak.”

Ogilvie did not know what to say. There was something in this passionate confession—in the cry wrung from a strong

man, and in the rude eloquence that here and there burst from him—that altogether drove ordinary words of counsel or consolation out of the young man's mind.

"You have been hard hit, Macleod," he said, with some earnestness.

"That is just it," Macleod said, almost bitterly. "You fire at a bird. You think you have missed him. He sails away as if there was nothing the matter, and the rest of the covey no doubt think he is as well as any one of them. But suddenly you see there is something wrong. He gets apart from the others; he towers; then down he comes, as dead as a stone. You did not guess anything of this in London?"

"Well," said Ogilvie, rather inclined to beat about the bush, "I thought you were paying her a good deal of attention. But then—she is very popular, you know, and receives a good deal of attention; and—and the fact is, she is an uncommonly pretty girl, and I thought you were flirting a bit with her, but nothing more than that. I had no idea it was something more serious than that."

"Ay," Macleod said, "if I myself had only known! If it was a plunge—as people talk about falling in love with a woman—why, the next morning I would have shaken myself free of it, as a Newfoundland dog shakes himself free of the water. But a fever, a madness, that slowly gains on you—and you look around and say it is nothing, but day after day it burns more and more. And it is no longer something that you can look at apart from yourself—it is your very self; and sometimes, Ogilvie, I wonder whether it is all true, or whether it is mad I am altogether. Newcastle—do you know Newcastle?"

"I have passed through it, of course," his companion said, more and more amazed at the vehemence of his speech.

"It is there she is now—I have seen it in the papers; and it is Newcastle—Newcastle—Newcastle—I am thinking of from morning till night, and if I could only see one of the streets of it I should be glad. They say it is smoky and grimy; I should be breathing sunlight if I lived in the most squalid of all its houses. And they say she is going to Liverpool, and to Manchester, and to Leeds; and it is as if my very life were being drawn away from me. I try to think what people may be around her; I try to imagine what she is doing at a particular hour of the day; and I feel as if I were shut away in an island in the middle of the Atlantic, with

nothing but the sound of the waves around my ears. Ogilvie, it is enough to drive a man out of his senses."

"But, look here, Macleod," said Ogilvie, pulling himself together; for it was hard to resist the influence of this vehement and uncontrollable passion—"look here, man; why don't you think of it in cold blood? Do you expect me to sympathize with you as a friend? Or would you like to know what any ordinary man of the world would think of the whole case?"

"Don't give me your advice, Ogilvie," said he, untwining and throwing away the bit of casting-line that had cut his finger. "It is far beyond that. Let me talk to you—that is all. I should have gone mad in another week, if I had had no one to speak to; and as it is, what better am I than mad? It is not anything to be analyzed and cured: it is my very self; and what have I become?"

"But look here, Macleod—I want to ask you a question: would you marry her?"

The common-sense of the younger man was re-asserting itself. This was what any one—looking at the whole situation from the Aldershot point of view—would at the outset demand? But if Macleod had known all that was implied in the question, it is probable that a friendship that had existed from boyhood would then and there have been severed. He took it that Ogilvie was merely referring to the thousand and one obstacles that lay between him and that obvious and natural goal.

"Marry her!" he exclaimed. "Yes, you are right to look at it in that way—to think of what it will all lead to. When I look forward, I see nothing but a maze of impossibilities and trouble. One might as well have fallen in love with one of the Roman maidens in the Temple of Vesta. She is a white slave. She is a sacrifice to the monstrous theories of that bloodless old pagan, her father. And then she is courted and flattered on all sides; she lives in a smoke of incense: do you think, even supposing that all other difficulties were removed—that she cared for no one else, that she were to care for me, that the influence of her father was gone—do you think she would surrender all the admiration she provokes and the excitement of the life she leads, to come and live in a dungeon in the Highlands? A single day like to-day would kill her, she is so fine and delicate—like a rose leaf, I have often thought. No, no, Ogilvie, I have thought of it every way. It is like a riddle that you

twist and twist about to try and get the answer ; and I can get no answer at all, unless wishing that I had never been born. And perhaps that would have been better."

"You take too gloomy a view of it, Macleod," said Ogilvie. "For one thing, look at the common-sense of the matter. Suppose that she is very ambitious to succeed in her profession, that is all very well ; but, mind you, it is a very hard life. And if you put before her the chance of being styled Lady Macleod—well, I may be wrong, but I should say that would count for something. I haven't known many actresses myself—"

"That is idle talk," Macleod said ; and then he added, proudly, "You do not know this woman as I know her."

He put aside his pipe ; but in truth he had never lit it.

"Come," said he, with a tired look, "I have bored you enough. You won't mind, Ogilvie ? The whole of the day I was saying to myself that I would keep all this thing to myself, if my heart burst over it ; but you see I could not do it, and I have made you the victim, after all. And we will go into the drawing-room now ; and we will have a song. And that was a very good song you sang one night in London, Ogilvie—it was about 'Death's black wine'—and do you think you could sing us that song to-night ?"

Ogilvie looked at him.

"I don't know what you mean by the way you are talking, Macleod," said he.

"Oh," said he, with a laugh that did not sound quite natural, "have you forgotten it ? Well, then, Janet will sing us another song—that is, 'Farewell, Manchester.' And we will go to bed soon to-night, for I have not been having much sleep lately. But it is a good song—it is a song you do not easily forget—that about 'Death's black wine.'"

CHAPTER XVI.

REBELLION.

AND where was she now—that strange creature who had bewildered and blinded his eyes and so sorely stricken his heart ? It was, perhaps, not the least part of his trouble

that all his passionate yearning to see her, and all his thinking about her and the scenes in which he had met her, seemed unable to conjure up any satisfactory vision of her. The longing of his heart went out from him to meet—a phantom. She appeared before him in a hundred shapes, now one, now the other; but all possessed with a terrible fascination from which it was in vain for him to try to flee.

Which was she, then — the pale, and sensitive, and thoughtful-eyed girl who listened with such intense interest to the gloomy tales of the Northern seas; who was so fine, and perfect, and delicate; who walked so gracefully and smiled so sweetly; the timid and gentle companion and friend?

Or the wild coquette, with her arch, shy ways, and her serious laughing, and her befooling of the poor stupid lover? He could hear her laugh now; he could see her feed her canary from her own lips. Where was the old mother whom that madcap girl teased and petted and delighted?

Or was not this she—the calm and gracious woman who received as a matter of right the multitude of attentions that all men—and women too—were glad to pay her? The air fine about her; the south winds fanning her cheek; the day long, and balmy, and clear. The white-sailed boats glide slowly through the water; there is a sound of music and of gentle talk; a butterfly comes fluttering over the blue summer seas. And then there is a murmuring refrain in the lapping of the waves: *Rose Leaf! Rose Leaf! what faint wind will carry you away to the south?*

Or this audacious Duchess of Devonshire, with the flashing black eyes, and a saucy smile on her lips? She knows that every one regards her; but what of that? Away she goes through the brilliant throng with that young Highland officer, with glowing light and gay costumes and joyous music all around her. What do you think of her, you poor clown, standing all alone and melancholy, with your cap and bells? Has she pierced your heart too with a flash of the saucy black eyes?

But there is still another vision; and perhaps this solitary dreamer, who has no eyes for the great slopes of Ben-an-Sloich that stretch into the clouds, and no ears for the soft calling of the sea-birds as they wheel over his head, tries hardest to fix this one in his memory. Here she is the neat and watchful house-mistress, with all things bright and shining around her; and she appears, too, as the meek daughter

and the kind and caressing sister. Is it not hard that she should be torn from this quiet little haven of domestic duties and family affection to be bound hand and foot in the chains of art, and flung into the arena to amuse that great ghoul-faced thing, the public? The white slave does not complain. While as yet she may, she presides over the cheerful table; and the beautiful small hands are helpful, and that light morning costume is a wonder of simplicity and grace. And then the garden, and the soft summer air, and the pretty ways of the two sisters: why should not this simple, homely, beautiful life last forever, if only the summer and the roses would last forever?

But suppose now that we turn aside from these fanciful pictures of Macleod's and take a more commonplace one of which he could have no notion whatever. It is night—a wet and dismal night—and a four-wheeled cab is jolting along through the dark and almost deserted thoroughfares of Manchester. Miss Gertrude White is in the cab, and the truth is that she is in a thorough bad temper. Whether it was that the unseemly scuffle that took place in the gallery during the performance, or whether it is that the streets of Manchester, in the midst of rain and after midnight are not inspiring, or whether it is merely that she has got a headache, it is certain that Miss White is in an ill-humor, and that she has not spoken a word to her maid, her only companion, since together they left the theatre. At length the cab stops opposite a hotel, which is apparently closed for the night. They get out, cross the muddy pavements under the glare of a gas-lamp; after some delay get into the hotel; pass through a dimly lit and empty corridor; and then Miss White bids her maid good-night and opens the door of a small parlor.

Here there is a more cheerful scene. There is a fire in the room; and there is supper laid on the table; while Mr. Septimus White, with his feet on the fender and his back turned to the lamp, is seated in an easy-chair, and holding up a book to the light so that the pages almost touch his gold-rimmed spectacles. Miss White sits down on the sofa on the dark side of the room. She has made no response to his greeting of "Well, Gerty?"

At length Mr. White becomes aware that his daughter is sitting there with her things on, and he turns from his book to her.

"Well, Gerty," he repeats, "aren't you going to have some supper?"

"No, thank you," she says.

"Come, come," he remonstrates, "that won't do. You must have some supper. Shall Jane get you a cup of tea?"

"I don't suppose there is any one up below; besides, I don't want it," says Miss White, rather wearily.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing," she answers; and then she looks at the mantelpiece. "No letter from Carry?"

"No."

"Well, I hope you won't make her an actress, papa," observes Miss White, with no relevance, but with considerable sharpness in her tone.

In fact, this remark was so unexpected and uncalled-for that Mr. White suddenly put his book down on his knee, and turned his gold spectacles full on his daughter's face.

"I will beg you to remember, Gerty," he remarked, with some dignity, "that I did not make you an actress, if that is what you imply. If it had not been entirely your wish, I should never have encouraged you; and I think it shows great ingratitude, not only to me but to the public also, that when you have succeeded in obtaining a position such as any woman in the country might envy, you treat your good fortune with indifference, and show nothing but discontent.

cannot tell what has come over you of late. You ought certainly to be the last to say anything against a profession that has gained for you such a large share of public favor—"

"Public favor!" she said, with a bitter laugh. "Who is the favorite of the public in this very town? Why, the girl who plays in that farce—who smokes a cigarette, and walks round the stage like a man, and dances a breakdown. Why wasn't I taught to dance breakdowns?"

Her father was deeply vexed; for this was not the first time she had dropped small rebellious hints. And if this feeling grew, she might come to question his most cherished theories.

"I should think you were jealous of that girl," said he, petulantly, "if it were not too ridiculous. You ought to remember that she is an established favorite here. She has amused these people year after year; they look on her as an old friend; they are grateful to her. The means she uses to make people laugh may not meet with your approval; but she knows her own business, doubtless; and she succeeds in her own way."

"Ah, well," said Miss White, as she put aside her bonnet, "I hope you won't bring up Carry to this sort of life."

"To what sort of life?" her father exclaimed, angrily. "Haven't you everything that can make life pleasant? I don't know what more you want. You have not a single care. You are petted and caressed wherever you go. And you ought to have the delight of knowing that the further you advance in your art the further rewards are in store for you. The way is clear before you. You have youth and strength; and the public is only too anxious to applaud whatever you undertake. And yet you complain of your manner of life."

"It isn't the life of a human being at all," she said, boldly—but perhaps it was only her headache, or her weariness, or her illhumor, that drove her to this rebellion; "it is the cutting one's self off from everything that makes life worth having. It is a continual degradation—the exhibition of feelings that ought to be a woman's most sacred and secret possession. And what will the end of it be? Already I begin to think I don't know what I am. I have to sympathize with so many characters—I have to be so many different people—that I don't quite know what my own character is, or if I have any at all——"

Her father was staring at her in amazement. What had led her into these fantastic notions? While she was professing that her ambition to become a great and famous actress was the one ruling thought and object of her life, was she really envying the poor domestic drudge whom she saw coming to the theatre to enjoy herself with her fool of a husband, having withdrawn for an hour or two from her housekeeping books and her squalling children? At all events, Miss White left him in no doubt as to her sentiments at that precise moment. She talked rapidly, and with a good deal of bitter feeling; but it was quite obvious, from the clearness of her line of contention, that she had been thinking over the matter. And while it was all a prayer that her sister Carry might be left to live a natural life, and that she should not be compelled to exhibit, for gain or applause, emotions which a woman would naturally lock up in her own heart, it was also a bitter protest against her own lot. What was she to become, she asked? A dram-drinker of fictitious sentiment? A Ten-minutes' Emotionalist? It was this last phrase that flashed in a new light on her father's bewildered mind. He remembered it instantly. So that was the source of inoperation?

"Oh, I see now," he said, with angry scorn. "You have learned your lesson well. A 'Ten-minutes' Emotionalist: I remember. I was wondering who had put such stuff into your head."

She colored deeply, but said nothing.

"And so you are taking your notion, as to what sort of life you would lead, from a Highland savage—a boor whose only occupations are eating and drinking and killing wild animals. A fine guide, truly! He has had so much experience in æsthetic matters! Or is it *metaphysics* is his hobby? And what, pray, is his notion as to what life should be? that the noblest object of a man's ambition should be to kill a stag? It was a mistake for Dante to let his work eat into his heart; he should have devoted himself to shooting rabbits. And Raphael—don't you think he would have improved his digestion by giving up pandering to the public taste for pretty things, and taking to hunting wild-boars? that is the theory, isn't it? Is that the *metaphysics* you have learned?"

"You may talk about it," she said, rather humbly—for she knew very well she could not stand against her father in argument, especially on a subject that he rather prided himself on having mastered—"but you are not a woman, and you don't know what a woman feels about such things."

"And since when have you made the discovery? What has happened to convince you so suddenly that your professional life is a degradation?"

"Oh," she said, carelessly, "I was scarcely thinking of myself. Of course I know what lies before me. It was about Carry I spoke to you."

"Carry shall decide for herself, as you did; and when she has done so, I hope she won't come and blame me the first time she gets some ridiculous idea into her head."

"Now, papa, that isn't fair," the eldest sister said, in a gentler voice. "You know I never blamed you. I only showed you that even a popular actress sometimes remembers that she is a woman. And if she is a woman, you must let her have a grumble occasionally."

This conciliatory tone smoothed the matter down at once; and Mr. White turned to his book with another recommendation to his daughter to take some supper and get to bed.

"I will go now," she said, rather wearily, as she rose. "Good-night, papa—What is that?"

She was looking at a parcel that lay on a chair.

"It came for you, to-night. There was seven and six-

pence to pay for extra carriage—it seems to have been forwarded from place to place.”

“As if I had not enough luggage to carry about with me!” she said.

But she proceeded to open the parcel all the same, which seemed to be very carefully swathed in repeated covers of canvas. And presently she uttered a slight exclamation. She took up one dark object after another, passing her hand over them, and back again, and finally pressing them to her cheek.

“Just look at these, papa—did you ever in all your life see anything so beautiful?”

She came to a letter, too; which she hastily tore open and read. It was a brief note, in terms of great respect, written by Sir Keith Macleod, and begging Miss White's acceptance of a small parcel of otter-skins, which he hoped might be made into some article of attire. Moreover, he had asked his cousin's advice on the matter; and she thought there were enough; but if Miss White, on further inquiry, found she would rather have one or two more, he had no doubt that within the next month or so he could obtain these also. It was a very respectful note.

But there was no shyness or timidity about the manner of Miss White when she spread those skins out along the sofa, and again and again took them up to praise their extraordinary glossiness and softness.

“Papa,” she exclaimed, “it is a present fit for a prince to make!”

“I dare say you will find them useful.”

“And whatever is made of them,” said she, with decision, “that I shall keep for myself—it won't be one of my stage properties.”

Her spirits rose wonderfully. She kept on chatting to her father about these lovely skins, and the jacket she would have of them. She asked why he was so dull that evening. She protested that she would not take any supper unless he had some too; whereupon he had a biscuit and a glass of claret, which, at all events, compelled him to lay aside his book. And then, when she had finished her supper, she suddenly said,—

“Now, Pappy dear, I am going to tell you a great secret. I am going to change the song in the second act.”

“Nonsense!” said he; but he was rather glad to see her come back to the interest of her work.

"I am," she said, seriously. "Would you like to hear it?"

"You will wake the house up."

"And if the public expect an actress to please them," she said, saucily, "they must take the consequences of her practising."

She went to the piano, and opened it. There was a fine courage in her manner as she struck the chords and sang the opening lines of the gay song:—

"'Threescore o' nobles rode up the King's ha'
But bonnie Glenogie's the flower of them a',
Wi' his milk-white steed and his bonnie black e'e.'"

—but here her voice dropped, and it was almost in a whisper that she let the maiden of the song utter the secret wish of her heart—

"'Glenogie, dear mither, Glenogie for me.'"

"Of course," she said, turning round to her father, and speaking in a business-like way, though there was a spice of proud mischief in her eyes, "There is a stumbling-block, or where would the story be! Glenogie is poor; the mother will not let her daughter have anything to do with him; the girl takes to her bed with the definite intention of dying."

She turned to the piano again.

"'There is, Glenogie, a letter for thee,
Oh, there is, Glenogie, a letter for thee.
The first line he looked at, a light laugh laughed he;
But ere he read through it, tears blinded his e'e.'"

"How do you like the air, papa?"

Mr. White did not seem over well pleased. He was quite aware that his daughter was a very clever young woman; and he did not know what insane idea might have got into her head of throwing an allegory at him.

"The air," said he, coldly, "is well enough. But I hope you don't expect an English audience to understand that doggerel Scotch."

"Glenogie understand it, any way," said she, blithely, "and naturally he rode off at once to see his dying sweet-heart."

"'Pale and wan was she, when Glenogie gaed ben,
But rosy-red grew she when Glenogie sat down.
She turned away her head, but the smile was in her e'e,
'Oh, binna feared, mither, I'll maybe no dee.'"

She shut the piano.

"Isn't it charmingly simple and tender, papa?" she said, with the same mischief in her eyes.

'I think it is foolish of you to think of exchanging that piece of doggerel—'

"For what?" said she, standing in the middle of the room. "For this?"

And therewith she sang these lines—giving an admirable burlesque imitation of herself, and her own gestures, and her own singing in the part she was then performing:—

"The morning bells are swinging, ringing,
Hail to the day!
The birds are winging, singing
To the golden day—
To the joyous day—
The morning bells are swinging, ringing,
And what do they say?
O bring my love to my love!
O bring my love to-day!
O bring my love to my love!
To be my love alway!"

It certainly was cruel to treat poor Mrs. Ross's home-made lyrics so; but Miss White was burlesquing herself as well as the song she had to sing. And as her father did not know to what lengths this iconoclastic fit might lead her, he abruptly bade her good-night and went to bed, no doubt hoping that next morning would find the demon exorcised from his daughter.

As for her, she had one more loving look over the skins, and then she carefully read through the note that accompanied them. There was a smile on her face—perhaps of pleasure, perhaps of amusement at the simplicity of the lines. However, she turned aside, and got hold of a small writing-desk, which she placed on the table.

"'Oh, here is, Glenogie, a letter for thee,'"

she hummed to herself, with a rather proud look on her face, as she seated herself and opened the desk.

CHAPTER XVII.

“FHIR A BHATA !”

YOUNG Ogilvie had obtained some brief extension of his leave, but even that was drawing to a close ; and Macleod saw with a secret dread that the hour of his departure was fast approaching. And yet he had not victimized the young man. After that first burst of confidence he had been sparing in his references to the trouble that had beset him. Of what avail, besides, could Mr. Ogilvie's counsels be ? Once or twice he had ventured to approach the subject with some commonplace assurances that there were always difficulties in the way of two people getting married, and that they had to be overcome with patience and courage. The difficulties that Macleod knew of as between himself and that impossible goal were deeper than any mere obtaining of the consent of friends or the arrangement of a way of living. From the moment that the terrible truth was forced on him he had never regarded his case but as quite hopeless ; and yet that in no way moderated his consuming desire to see her—to hear her speak—even to have correspondence with her. It was something that he could send her a parcel of otter-skins.

But all the same Mr. Ogilvie was in some measure a friend of hers. He knew her—he had spoken to her—no doubt when he returned to the South he would see her one day or another, and he would surely speak of the visit he had paid to Castle Dare. Macleod set about making that visit as pleasant as might be, and the weather aided him. The fair heavens shone over the windy blue seas ; and the green island of Ulva lay basking in the sunlight, and as the old *U'mpire*, with her heavy bows parting the rushing waves, carried them out to the west, they could see the black skarts standing on the rocks of Gometra, and clouds of puffins wheeling round the dark and lonely pillars of Staffa ; while away in the north, as they got clear of Treshanish Point, the mountains of Rum and of Skye appeared a pale and spectral blue, like ghostly shadows at the horizon. And there was no end to the sports and pastimes that occupied day after day. On their first ex-

pedition up the lonely corries of Ben-an-Sloich young Ogilvie brought down a royal hart—though his hand trembled for ten minutes after he pulled the trigger. They shot wild duck in Loch Scridain, and seals in Loch-na-Keal, and rock-pigeons along the face of the honey-combed cliffs of Gribun. And what was this new form of sport? They were one day being pulled in the gig up a shallow loch in the hope of finding a brood or two of young mergansers, when Macleod, who was seated up at the bow, suddenly called to the man to stop. He beckoned to Ogilvie, who went forward and saw, quietly moving over the sea-weed, a hideously ugly fish with the flat head and sinister eyes of a snake. Macleod picked up the boat-hook, steadied himself in the boat, and then drove the iron spike down.

“I have him,” he said. “That is the snake of the sea—I hate him as I hate a serpent.”

He hoisted out of the water the dead dog-fish, which was about four feet long, and then shook it back.

“Here, Ogilvie,” said he, “take the boat-hook. There are plenty about here. Make yourself St. Patrick exterminating snakes.”

Ogilvie tried the dog-fish spearing with more or less success; but it was the means of procuring for him a bitter disappointment. As they went quietly over the sea-weed—the keel of the boat hissing through it and occasionally grating on the sand—they perceived that the water was getting a bit deeper, and it was almost impossible to strike the boat-hook straight. At this moment, Ogilvie, happening to cast a glance along the rocks close by them, started and seized Macleod’s arm. What the frightened eyes of the younger man seemed to see was a great white and gray object lying on the rocks, and staring at him with huge black eyes. At first it almost appeared to him to be a man with a grizzled and hairy face; then he tried to think of some white beast with big black eyes; then he knew. For the next second there was an unwieldy roll down the rocks, and then a heavy splash in the water; and the huge gray seal had disappeared. And there he stood helpless, with the boat-hook in his hand.

“It is my usual luck,” said he, in despair. “If I had had my rifle in my hand, we should never have got within a hundred yards of the beast. But I got an awful fright. I never before saw a live seal just in front of one’s nose like that.”

“You would have missed him,” said Macleod, coolly.

"At a dozen yards?"

"Yes. When you come on one so near as that, you are too startled to take aim. You would have blazed away and missed."

"I don't think so," said Ogilvie, with some modest persistence. "When I shot that stag, I was steady enough, though I felt my heart thumping away like fun."

"There you had plenty of time to take your aim—and a rock to rest your rifle on." And then he added: "You would have broken Hamish's heart, Ogilvie, if you had missed that stag. He was quite determined you should have one on your first day out; and I never saw him take such elaborate precautions before. I suppose it was terribly tedious to you; but you may depend on it it was necessary. There isn't one of the younger men can match Hamish, though he was bred a sailor."

"Well," Mr. Ogilvie admitted, "I began to think we were having a great deal of trouble for nothing; especially when it seemed as though the wind were blowing half a dozen ways in the one valley."

"Why, man," Macleod said, "Hamish knows every one of those eddies just as if they were all down on a chart. And he is very determined, too, you shall have another stag before you go, Ogilvie; for it is not much amusement we have been giving you since you came to us."

"That is why I feel so particularly jolly at the notion of having to go back," said Mr. Ogilvie, with very much the air of a schoolboy at the end of his holiday. "The day after to-morrow, too!"

"To-morrow, then, we will try to get a stag for you; and the day after you can spend what time you can at the pools in Glen Muick."

These last two days were right royal days for the guest at Castle Dare. On the deer-stalking expedition Macleod simply refused to take his rifle with him, and spent all his time in whispered consultations with Hamish, and with eager watching of every bird whose solitary flight along the mountain-side might startle the wary hinds. After a long day of patient and stealthy creeping, and walking through bogs and streams, and slow toiling up rocky slopes, the party returned home in the evening; and when it was found that a splendid stag—with brow, bay, and tray, and crockets complete—was strapped on to the pony, and when the word was passed that Sandy the red-haired and John from the yacht,

were to take back the pony to a certain well-known cairn where another monarch of the hills lay slain, there was a great rejoicing through Castle Dare, and Lady Macleod herself must needs come out to shake hands with her guest, and to congratulate him on his good fortune.

"It is little we have been able to do to entertain you," said the old silver-haired lady, "but I am glad you have got a stag or two."

"I knew what Highland hospitality was before I came to Castle Dare," said the boy, modestly. "But you have been kinder to me even than anything I knew before."

"And you will leave the heads with Hamish," said she, "and we will send them to Glasgow to be mounted for you, and then we will send them South to you."

"Indeed no," said he (though he was thinking to himself that it was no wonder the Macleods of Dare were poor); "I will not put you to any such trouble. I will make my own arrangements with Hamish."

"Then you will tell him not to forget Aldershot."

"I think, Lady Macleod," said the young lieutenant, "that my mess-companions will be sorry to hear that I have left Dare. I should think they ought to have drunk your health many times ere now."

Next day, moreover, he was equally successful by the side of the deep brown pools in Glen Muick. He was a pretty fair fisherman, though he had had but small experience with such a mighty engine of a rod as Hamish put into his hands. When, however, he showed Hamish the fine assortment of salmon flies he had brought with him, the old man only shook his head. Thereafter, whenever Hamish went with him, nothing was said about flies until they neared the side of the brawling stream that came pouring down between the gray rocks and the patches of moist brown moor. Hamish would sit down on a stone, and take out a tin box and open it. Then he would take a quick look round—at the aspect of the clouds, the direction of the wind, and so forth; and then, with a nimbleness that any one looking at his rough hands and broad thumbs would have considered impossible, would busk up a weapon of capture that soon showed itself to be deadly enough. And on this last day of Ogilvie's stay at Castle Dare he was unusually lucky—though of course there were one or two heartrending mishaps. As they walked home in the evening—the lowering day had cleared away into a warm sunset, and they could see Colonsay, and Fladda,

and the Dutchman's Cap, lying dark and purple on a golden sea—Ogilvie said :—

“Look here, Macleod, if you would like me to take one of these salmon for Miss White, I could take it as part of my luggage, and have it delivered at once.”

“That would be no use,” said he, rather gloomily. “She is not in London. She is at Liverpool or Manchester by this time. I have already sent her a present.”

Ogilvie did not think fit to ask what; though he had guessed.

“It was a parcel of otter-skins,” Macleod said. “You see, you might present that to any lady—it is merely a curiosity of the district—it is no more than if an acquaintance were to give me a chip of quartz he had brought from the Rocky Mountains with a few grains of copper or silver in it.”

“It is a present any lady would be glad to have,” observed Mr. Ogilvie, with a smile. “Has she got them yet?”

“I do not know,” Macleod answered. “Perhaps there is not time for an answer. Perhaps she has forgotten who I am, and is affronted at a stranger sending her a present.”

“Forgotten who you are!” Ogilvie exclaimed; and then he looked round to see that Hamish and Sandy the red-haired were at a convenient distance. “Do you know this, Macleod? A man never yet was in love with a woman without the woman being instantly aware of it.”

Macleod glanced at him quickly; then turned away his head again, apparently watching the gulls wheeling high over the sea—black spots against the glow of the sunset.

“That is foolishness,” said he. “I had a great care to be quite a stranger to her all the time I was in London. I myself scarcely knew—how could she know? Sometimes I thought I was rude to her, so that I should deceive myself into believing she was only a stranger.”

Then he remembered one fact, and his downright honesty made him speak again.

“One night, it is true,” said he—“it was the last night of my being in London—I asked a flower from her. She gave it to me. She was laughing at the time. That was all.”

The sunset had gone away, and the clear northern twilight was fading too, when young Ogilvie, having bade good-bye to Lady Macleod and her niece Janet, got into the broad-beamed boat of the fishermen, accompanied by his friend. There was something of a breeze, and they hoisted a lugsail

so that they should run out to meet the steamer. Donald the piper lad was not with them ; Macleod wanted to speak to his friend Ogilvie as he was leaving.

And yet he did not say anything of importance. He seemed to be chiefly interested in finding out whether Ogilvie could not get a few days' leave, about Christmas, that he might come up and try the winter shooting. He was giving minute particulars about the use of arsenic paste when the box of skins to be despatched by Hamish reached London ; and he was discussing what sort of mounting should be put on a strange old bottle that Janet Macleod had presented to the departing guest. There was no word of that which lay nearest his heart.

And so the black waves rolled by them ; and the light at the horizon began to fade ; and the stars were coming out one by one ; while the two sailors forward (for Macleod was steering) were singing to themselves :

*" Fhir a bhata (na horo eile)
Fhir a bhata (na horo eile)
Fhir a bhata (na horo eile)
Chead soire slann leid ge thobh a theid u ! "*

that is to say,

" O Boatman,
And Boatman,
And Boatman,
A hundred farewells to you wherever you may go ? "

And then the lug-sail was hauled down, and they lay on the lapping water ; and they could hear all around them the soft callings of the guillemots and razor-bills, and other divers whose home is the heaving wave. And then the great steamer came up and slowed ; and the boat was hauled alongside and young Ogilvie sprang up the slippery steps,

" Good-bye, Macleod ! "

" Good-bye, Ogilvie ! Come up at Christmas. "

The great bulk of the steamer soon floated away, and the lug-sail was run up again, and the boat made slowly back for Castle Dare. " Fhir a bhata ! " the men sung ; but Macleod scarcely heard them. His last tie with the South had been broken.

But not quite. It was about ten o'clock that night that word came to Castle Dare that Dugald the Post had met with an accident that morning while starting from Bunessan ; and that his place had been taken by a young lad who had but

now arrived with the bag. Macleod hastily looked over the bundle of newspapers, etc., they brought him, and his eager eyes fell on an envelope, the writing on which made his heart jump.

"Give the lad a half-crown," said he.

And then he went to his own room. He had the letter in his hand; and he knew the handwriting; but there was no wind of the night that could bring him the mystic message she had sent with it:

"Oh, here is, Glenogie, a letter for thee!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONFIDENCES.

FOR a second or two he held the letter in his hand, regarding the outside of it; and it was with more deliberation than haste that he opened it. Perhaps it was with some little tremor of fear—lest the first words that should meet his eye might be cruelly cold and distant. What right had he to expect anything else? Many a time, in thinking carefully over the past, he had recalled the words—the very tone—in which he had addressed her, and had been dismayed to think of their reserve, which had on one or two occasions almost amounted to austerity. He could expect little beyond a formal acknowledgment of the receiving of his letter, and the present that had accompanied it.

Imagine, then, his surprise when he took out from the envelope a number of sheets closely written over in her beautiful, small, neat hand. Hastily his eye ran over the first few lines; and then surprise gave way to a singular feeling of gratitude and joy. Was it indeed she who was writing to him thus? When he had been thinking of her as some one far away and unapproachable—who could have no thought of him or of the too brief time in which he had been near to her—had she indeed been treasuring up some recollection that she now seemed disposed to value?

"You will guess that I am woman enough," she wrote, "to be greatly pleased and flattered by your sending me such

a beautiful present ; but you must believe me when I say that its chief value to me was its showing me that I had another friend in the world who was not disposed to forget me the next day after bidding me good-bye. Perhaps you will say that I am cynical ; but actresses are accustomed to find the friendships they make—outside the sphere of their own profession—of a singularly temporary character. We are praised and flattered to-day, and forgotten to-morrow. I don't complain. It is only natural. People go away to their own families and home occupations ; why should they remember a person who has amused them for an hour ? ”

Miss Gertrude White could, when she chose, write a clever and interesting letter—interesting from its very simplicity and frankness ; and as Macleod read on and on, he ceased to feel any wonder that this young lady should be placing before him such ample revelations of her experiences and opinions. Indeed, it was more than suggested in this confidential chat that Sir Keith Macleod himself had been the first cause of her having carefully studied her own position, and the influence likely to be exerted on her by her present mode of life.

“ One meets with the harsher realities of an actress's life,” she said, “ in the provinces. It is all very fine in London, when all the friends you happen to have are in town, and where there is constant amusement, and pleasant parties, and nice people to meet ; and then you have the comforts of your own home around you, and quiet and happy Sundays. But a provincial tour!—the constant travelling, and rehearsals with strange people, and damp lodgings, and miserable hotels, and wet Sundays in smoky towns ! Papa is very good and kind, you know ; but he is interested in his books, and he goes about all day hunting after curiosities, and one has not a soul to speak to. Then the audiences : I have witnessed one or two scenes lately that would unnerve any one ; and of course I have to stand helpless and silent on the stage until the tumult is stilled and the original offenders expelled. Some sailors the other evening amused themselves by clambering down the top gallery to the pit, hanging on to the gas-brackets and the pillars ; and one of them managed to reach the orchestra, jump from the drum on to the stage, and then offered me a glass of whiskey from a big black bottle he had in his hand. When I told papa, he laughed, and said I should be proud of my triumph over the man's imagination. But when the people roared with laughter at my discomfiture, I

felt as though I would rather be earning my bread by selling watercresses in the street or by stitching in a garret."

Of course the cry of the poor injured soul found a ready echo in his heart. It was monstrous that she should be subjected to such indignities. And then that cruel old pagan of a father—was he not ashamed of himself to see the results of his own cold-blooded theories? Was this the glory of art? Was this the reward of the sacrifice of a life? That a sensitive girl should be publicly insulted by a tipsy maniac, and jeered at by a brutal crowd? Macleod laid down the letter for a minute or two, and the look on his face was not lovely to see.

"You may think it strange that I should write thus to you," she said; "but if I say that it was yourself who first set me thinking about such things? And since I have been thinking about them I have had no human being near me to whom I could speak. You know papa's opinions. Even if my dearest friend, Mrs. Ross, were here, what would she say? She has known me only in London. She thinks it a fine thing to be a popular actress. She sees people ready to pet me, in a way—so long as society is pleased to have a little curiosity about me. But she does not see the other side of the picture. She does not even ask how long all this will last. She never thinks of the cares and troubles and downright hard work. If ever you heard me sing, you will know that I have very little of a voice, and that not worth much; but trifling as it is, you would scarcely believe the care and cultivation I have to spend on it, merely for business purposes. Mrs. Ross, no doubt, sees that it is pleasant enough for a young actress, who is fortunate enough to have won some public favor, to go sailing in a yacht on the Thames, on a summer day, with nice companions around her. She does not see her on a wet day in Newcastle, practising scales for an hour at a stretch, though her throat is half choked with the fog, in a dismal parlor with a piano out of tune, and with the prospect of having to go out through the wet to a rehearsal in a damp and draughty theatre, with escaped gas added to the fog. That is very nice, isn't it?"

It almost seemed to him—so intense and eager was his involuntary sympathy—as though he himself were breathing fog, and gas, and the foul odors of an empty theatre. He went to the window and threw it open, and sat down there. The stars were no longer quivering white on the black surface of the water, for the moon had risen now in the south, and

there was a soft glow all shining over the smooth Atlantic. Sharp and white was the light on the stone-walls of Castle Dare, and on the gravelled path, and the rocks and the trees around ; but faraway it was a milder radiance that lay over the sea, and touched here and there the shores of Inch Kenneth and Ulva and Colonsay. It was a fair and peaceful night, with no sound of human unrest to break the sleep of the world. Sleep, solemn and profound, dwelt over the lonely islands—over Staffa, with her resounding caves, and Fladda, with her desolate rocks, and Iona, with her fairy-white sands, and the distant Dutchman, and Coll, and Tiree, all haunted by the wild sea-birds' cry ; and a sleep as deep dwelt over the silent hills, far up under the cold light of the skies. Surely, if any poor suffering heart was vexed by the contentions of crowded cities, here, if anywhere in the world, might rest and peace and loving solace be found. He sat dreaming there ; he had half forgotten the letter.

He roused himself from his reverie, and returned to the light.

"And yet I would not complain of mere discomfort," she continued, "if that were all. People who have to work for their living must not be too particular. What pains me most of all is the effect that this sort of work is having on myself. You would not believe—and I am almost ashamed to confess—how I am worried by small and mean jealousies and anxieties, and how I am tortured by the expression of opinions which, all the same, I hold in contempt. I reason with myself to no purpose. It ought to be no concern of mine if some girl in a burlesque makes the house roar, by the manner in which she walks up and down the stage smoking a cigar ; and yet I feel angry at the audience for applauding such stuff, and I wince when I see her praised in the papers. Oh ! these papers ! I have been making minute inquiries of late ; and I find that the usual way in these towns is to let the young literary aspirant who has just joined the office, or the clever compositor who has been promoted to the sub-editor's room, try his hand first of all at reviewing books, and then turn him on to dramatic and musical criticism ! Occasionally a reporter, who has been round the police courts to get notes of the night charges, will drop into the theatre on his way to the office, and 'do a par.,' as they call it. Will you believe it possible that the things written of me by these persons—with their pretentious airs of criticism, and their gross ignorance cropping up at

every point—have the power to vex and annoy me most terribly? I laugh at the time, but the phrase rankles in my memory all the same. One learned young man said of me the other day: ‘It is really distressing to mark the want of unity in her artistic characterizations when one regards the natural advantages that nature has heaped upon her with no sparing hand.’ The natural advantages that nature has heaped upon me! ‘And perhaps, also,’ he went on to say, ‘Miss White would do well to pay some little more attention before venturing on pronouncing the classic names of Greece. Iphigenia herself would not have answered to her name if she had heard it pronounced with the accent on the fourth syllable.’ ”

Macleod brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

“If I had that fellow,” said he, aloud—“if I had that fellow, I should like to spin for a shark off Dubh Artach lighthouse.” And here a most unholy vision rose before him of a new sort of sport—a sailing launch going about six knots an hour, a goodly rope at the stern with a huge hook through the gill of the luckless critic, a swivel to make him spin, and then a few smart trips up and down by the side of the lonely Dubh Artach rocks, where Mr. Ewing and his companions occasionally find a few sharks coming up to the surface to stare at them.

“Is it not too ridiculous that such things should vex me—that I should be so absolutely at the mercy of the opinion of people whose judgment I know to be absolutely valueless? I find the same thing all around me. I find a middle-aged man, who knows his work thoroughly, and has seen all the best actors of the past quarter of a century, will go about quite proudly with a scrap of approval from some newspaper, written by a young man who has never travelled beyond the suburbs of his native town, and has seen no acting beyond that of the local company. But there is another sort of critic—the veteran, the man who has worked hard on the paper and worn himself out, and who is turned off from politics, and pensioned by being allowed to display his imbecility in less important matters. Oh dear! what lessons he reads you! The solemnity of them! Don’t you know that at the end of the second act the business of Mrs. So-and-So (some actress who died when George IV. was king) was this, that, or the other?—and how dare you, you impertinent minx, fly in the face of well-known stage traditions? I have been introduced lately to a specimen of both classes. I think the young man

—he had beautiful long fair hair and a Byronic collar, and was a little nervous—fell in love with me, for he wrote a furious panegyric of me, and sent it next morning with a bouquet, and begged for my photograph. The elderly gentleman, on the other hand, gave me a great deal of good advice ; but I subdued even him, for before he went away he spoke in a broken voice, and there were tears in his eyes, which papa said were owing to a variety of causes. It is ludicrous enough, no doubt, but it is also a little bit humiliating. I try to laugh the thing away, whether the opinion expressed about me is solemnly stupid or merely impertinent, but the vexation of it remains ; and the chief vexation to me is that I should have so little command of myself, so little respect for myself, as to suffer myself to be vexed. But how can one help it ? Public opinion is the very breath and life of a theatre and of every one connected with it ; and you come to attach importance to the most foolish expression of opinion in the most obscure print.”

“ And so, my dear friend, I have had my grumble out—and made my confession too, for I should not like to let every one know how foolish I am about those petty vexations—and you will see that I have not forgotten what you said to me, and that further reflection and experience have only confirmed it. But I must warn you. Now that I have victimized you to this fearful extent, and liberated my mind, I feel much more comfortable. As I write, there is a blue color coming into the window that tells me the new day is coming. Would it surprise you if the new day brought a complete new set of feelings ? I have begun to doubt whether I have got any opinions—whether, having to be so many different people in the course of a week, I have any clear notion as to what I myself am. One thing is certain, that I have been greatly vexed and worried of late by a succession of the merest trifles ; and when I got your kind letter and present this evening, I suddenly thought, Now for a complete confession and protest. I know you will forgive me for having victimized you, and that as soon as you have thrown this rambling epistle into the fire you will try to forget all the nonsense it contains and will believe that I hope always to remain your friend,

“ GERTRUDE WHITE.”

His quick and warm sympathy refused to believe the half of this letter. It was only because she knew what was owing

to the honor and self-respect of a true woman that she spoke in this tone of bitter and scornful depreciation of herself. It was clear that she was longing for the dignity and independence of a more natural way of life. And this revelation—that she was not, after all, banished forever into that cold region of art in which her father would fain keep her—somewhat bewildered him at first. The victim might be reclaimed from the altar and restored to the sphere of simple human affections, natural duties, and joy? And if he—

Suddenly, and with a shock of delight that made his heart throb, he tried to picture this beautiful fair creature sitting over there in that very chair by the side of the fire, her head bent down over her sewing, the warm light of the lamp touching the tender curve of her cheek. And when she lifted her head to speak to him—and when her large and lambent eyes met his—surely Fionaghal, the fair poetess from strange lands, never spoke in softer tones than this other beautiful stranger, who was now his wife and his heart's companion. And now he would bid her lay aside her work, and he would get a white shawl for her, and like a ghost she would steal out with him into the moonlight air. And is there enough wind on this summer night to take them out from the sombre shore to the open plain of the sea? Look now, as the land recedes, at the high walls of Castle Dare, over the black cliffs, and against the stars. Far away they see the graveyard of Inch Kenneth, the stones pale in the moonlight. And what song will she sing now, that Ulva and Colonsay may awake and fancy that some mermaiden is singing to bewail her lost lover? The night is sad, and the song is sad; and then, somehow, he finds himself alone in this waste of water, and all the shores of the islands are silent and devoid of life, and there is only the echo of the sad singing in his ears—

He jumps to his feet, for there is a knocking at the door. The gentle Cousin Janet enters, and hastily he thrusts that letter into his pocket, while his face blushes hotly.

“Where have you been, Keith?” she says, in her quiet, kindly way. “Auntie would like to say good-night to you now.”

“I will come directly,” said he.

“And now that Norman Ogilvie is away, Keith,” said she, “you will take more rest about the shooting; for you have not been looking like yourself at all lately; and you know, Keith, when you are not well and happy, it is no one

at all about Dare that is happy either. And that is why you will take care of yourself."

He glanced at her rather uneasily ; but he said, in a light and careless way,—

"Oh, I have been well enough, Janet, except that I was not sleeping well one or two nights. And if you look after me like that, you will make me think I am a baby, and you will send me some warm flannels when I go up on the hills."

"It is too proud of your hardihood you are, Keith," said his cousin, with a smile. "But there never was a man of your family who would take any advice."

"I would take any advice from you, Janet," said he ; and therewith he followed her to bid good-night to the silver-haired mother.

CHAPTER XIX.

A RESOLVE.

HE slept but little that night, and early the next morning he was up and away by himself—paying but little heed to the rushing blue seas, and the white gulls, and the sunshine touching the far sands on the shores of Iona. He was in a fever of unrest. He knew not what to make of that letter ; it might mean anything or nothing. Alternations of wild hope and cold despair succeeded each other. Surely it was unusual for a girl so to reveal her innermost confidences to any one whom she considered a stranger ? To him alone had she told this story of her private troubles. Was it not in effect asking for a sympathy which she could not hope for from any other ? Was it not establishing a certain secret between them ? Her own father did not know. Her sister was too young to be told. Friends like Mrs. Ross could not understand why this young and beautiful actress, the favorite of the public, could be dissatisfied with her lot. It was to him alone she had appealed.

And then again he read the letter. The very frankness of it made him fear. There was none of the shyness of a girl writing to one who might be her lover. She might have written thus to one of her school-companions. He eagerly

searched it for some phrase of tenderer meaning; but no there was a careless abandonment about it, as if she had been talking without thinking of the person she addressed. She had even joked about a young man falling in love with her. It was a matter of perfect indifference to her. It was ludicrous as the shape of the lad's collar was ludicrous, but of no more importance. And thus she receded from his imagination again, and became a thing apart—the white slave bound in those cruel chains that seemed to all but herself and him the badges of triumph.

Herself and him—the conjunction set his heart throbbing quickly. He eagerly bethought himself how this secret understanding could be strengthened, if only he might see her and speak to her. He could tell by her eyes what she meant, whatever her words might be. *If only he could see her again*: all his wild hopes, and fears, and doubts—all his vague fancies and imaginings—began to narrow themselves down to this one point; and this immediate desire became all-consuming. He grew sick at heart when he looked round and considered how vain was the wish.

The gladness had gone from the face of Keith Macleod. Not many months before, any one would have imagined that the life of this handsome young fellow, whose strength, and courage, and high spirits seemed to render him insensible to any obstacle, had everything in it that the mind of man could desire. He had a hundred interests and activities; he had youth and health, and a comely presence; he was on good terms with everybody around him—for he had a smile and a cheerful word for each one he met, gentle or simple. All this gay, glad life seemed to have fled. The watchful Hamish was the first to notice that his master began to take less and less interest in the shooting and boating and fishing; and at times the old man was surprised and disturbed by an exhibition of querulous impatience that had certainly never before been one of Macleod's failings. Then his cousin Janet saw that he was silent and absorbed; and his mother inquired once or twice why he did not ask one or other of his neighbors to come over to Dare to have a day's shooting with him.

"I think you are finding the place lonely, Keith, now that Norman Ogilvie is gone," said she.

"Ah, mother," he said, with a laugh, "it is not Norman Ogilvie, it is London, that has poisoned my mind. I should never have gone to the South. I am hungering for the flesh-

pots of Egypt already ; and I am afraid some day I will have to come and ask you to let me go away again."

He spoke jestingly, and yet he was regarding his mother.

"I know it is not pleasant for a young man to be kept fretting at home," said she. "But it is not long now I will ask you to do that, Keith."

Of course this brief speech only drove him into more vigorous demonstration that he was not fretting at all ; and for a time he seemed more engrossed than ever in all the occupations he had but recently abandoned. But whether he was on the hillside, or down in the glen, or out among the islands, or whether he was trying to satisfy the hunger of his heart with books long after every one in Castle Dare had gone to bed, he could not escape from this gnawing and torturing anxiety. It was no beautiful and gentle sentiment that possessed him—a pretty thing to dream about during a summer's morning—but, on the contrary, a burning fever of unrest, that left him peace nor day nor night. "Sudden love is followed by sudden hate," says the Gaelic proverb ; but there had been no suddenness at all about this passion that had stealthily got hold of him ; and he had ceased even to hope that it might abate or depart altogether. He had to "dree his weird." And when he read in books about the joy and delight that accompany the awakening of love—how the world suddenly becomes fair, and the very skies are bluer than their wont—he wondered whether he was different from other human beings. The joy and delight of love ? He knew only a sick hunger of the heart and a continual and brooding despair.

One morning he was going along the cliffs, his only companion being the old black retriever, when suddenly he saw, far away below him, the figure of a lady. For a second his heart stood still at the sight of this stranger ; for he knew it was neither the mother nor Janet ; and she was coming along a bit of greensward from which, by dint of much climbing, she might have reached Castle Dare. But as he watched her he caught sight of some other figures, farther below on the rocks. And then he perceived—as he saw her return with a handful of bell-heather—that this party had come from Iona, or Bunessan, or some such place, to explore one of the great caves on this coast, while this lady had wandered away from them in search of some wild flowers. By and by he saw the small boat, with its spritsail white in the

sun, go away toward the south, and the lonely coast was left as lonely as before.

But ever after that he grew to wonder what Gertrude White, if ever she could be persuaded to visit his home, would think of this thing and of that thing—what flowers she would gather—whether she would listen to Hamish's stories of the fairies—whether she would be interested in her small countryman, Johnny Wickes, who was now in kilts, with his face and legs as brown as a berry—whether the favorable heavens would send her sunlight and blue skies, and the moonlight nights reveal to her the solemn glory of the sea and the lonely islands. Would she take his hand to steady herself in passing over the slippery rocks? What would she say if suddenly she saw above her—by the opening of a cloud—a stag standing high on a crag near the summit of Ben-an-Sloich? And what would the mother and Janet say to that singing of hers, if they were to hear her put all the tenderness of the low, sweet voice into "Wae's me for Prince Charlie?"

There was one secret nook that more than any other he associated with her presence; and thither he would go when this heart-sickness seemed too grievous to be borne. It was down in a glen beyond the fir-wood; and here the ordinary desolation of this bleak coast ceased, for there were plenty of young larches on the sides of the glen, with a tall silver-birch or two; while down in the hollow there were clumps of alders by the side of the brawling stream. And this dell that he sought was hidden away from sight, with the sun but partially breaking through the alders and rowans, and bespeckling the great gray boulders by the side of the burn, many of which were covered by the softest of olive-green moss. Here, too, the brook, that had been broken just above by intercepting stones, swept clearly and limpidly over a bed of smooth rock; and in the golden-brown water the trout lay, and scarcely moved until some motion of his hand made them shoot up stream with a lightning speed. And then the wild flowers around—the purple ling and red bell-heather growing on the silver-gray rocks; a foxglove or two towering high above the golden-green breckans; the red star of a crane's-bill among the velvet moss. Even if she were overawed by the solitariness of the Atlantic and the gloom of the tall cliffs and their yawning caves, surely here would be a haven of peace and rest, with ~~sunshine~~ sunshine, and flowers, and the pleasant murmur of the stream. What did

it say, then, as one sat and listened in the silence? When the fair poetess from strange lands came among the Macleods, did she seek out this still retreat, and listen, and listen, and listen until she caught the music of this monotonous murmur, and sang it to her harp? And was it not all a song about the passing away of life, and how that summer days were for the young, and how the world was beautiful for lovers? "Oh, children!" it seemed to say, "why should you waste your lives in vain endeavor, while the winter is coming quick, and the black snowstorms, and a roaring of wind from the sea? Here I have flowers for you, and beautiful sunlight, and the peace of summer days. Time passes—time passes—time passes—and you are growing old. While as yet the heart is warm and the eye is bright, here are summer flowers for you, and a silence fit for the mingling of lovers' speech. If you listen not, I laugh at you and go my way. But the winter is coming fast."

Far away in these grimy towns, fighting with mean cares and petty jealousies, dissatisfied, despondent, careless as to the future, how could this message reach her to fill her heart with the singing of a bird? He dared not send it, at all events. But he wrote to her. And the bitter travail of the writing of that letter he long remembered. He was bound to give her his sympathy, and to make light as well as he could of those very evils which he had been the first to reveal to her. He tried to write in as frank and friendly a spirit as she had done; the letter was quite cheerful.

"Did you know," said he, "that once upon a time the chief of the Macleods married a fairy? And whether Macleod did not treat her well, or whether the fairy-folk reclaimed her, or whether she grew tired of the place, I do not know quite; but, at all events, they were separated, and she went away to her own people. But before she went away she gave to Macleod a fairy banner—the *Bratach sith* it is known as—and she told him that if ever he was in great peril, or had any great desire, he was to wave that flag, and whatever he desired would come to pass. But the virtue of the *Bratach sith* would depart after it had been waved three times. Now the small green banner has been waved only twice; and now I believe it is still preserved in the Castle of Dunvegan, with power to work one more miracle on behalf of the Macleods. And if I had the fairy flag, do you know what I would do with it? I would take it in my hand, and say: '*I desire the fairy people to remove my friend Gertrude White from*

all the evil influences that disturb and distress her. I desire them to heal her wounded spirit, and secure for her everything that may tend to her life-long happiness. And I desire that all the theatres in the kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland—with all their musical instruments, lime-light, and painted scenes—may be taken and dropped into the ocean, midway between the islands of Ulva and Coll, so that the fairy folk may amuse themselves in them if they will so please.' Would not that be a very nice form of incantation? We are very strong believers here in the power of one person to damage another in absence; and when you can kill a man by sticking pins into a waxen image of him—which everybody knows to be true—surely you ought to be able to help a friend, especially with the aid of the *Bratach sith*. Imagine Covent Garden Theatre a hundred fathoms down in the deep sea, with mermaidens playing the brass instruments in the orchestra, and the fairy-folk on the stage, and seals disporting themselves in the stalls, and guillemots shooting about the upper galleries in pursuit of fish. But we should get no peace from Iona. The fairies there are very pious people. They used to carry St. Columba about when he got tired. They would be sure to demand the shutting up of all the theatres, and the destruction of the brass instruments. And I don't see how we could reasonably object."

It was a cruel sort of jesting; but how otherwise than as a jest could he convey to her, an actress, his wish that all theatres were at the bottom of the sea? For a brief time that letter seemed to establish some link of communication between him and her. He followed it on its travels by sea and land. He thought of its reaching the house in which she dwelt—perhaps some plain and grimy building in a great manufacturing city, or perhaps a small quiet cottage up by Regent's Park half hidden among the golden leaves of October. Might she not, moreover, after she had opened it and read it, be moved by some passing whim to answer it, though it demanded no answer? He waited for a week, and there was no word or message from the South. She was far away, and silent. And the hills grew lonelier than before, and the sickness of his heart increased.

This state of mind could not last. His longing and impatience and unrest became more than he could bear. It was in vain that he tried to satisfy his imaginative craving with these idle visions of her: it was she herself he must see; and he set about devising all manner of wild excuses for one

last visit to the South. But the more he considered these various projects, the more ashamed he grew in thinking of his taking any one of them and placing it before the beautiful old dame who reigned in Castle Dare. He had barely been three months at home : how could he explain to her this sudden desire to go away again ?

One morning his cousin Janet came to him.

"Oh, Keith!" said she, "the whole house is in commotion ; and Hamish is for murdering some of the lads ; and there is no one would dare to bring the news to you. The two young buzzards have escaped !"

"I know it," he said. "I let them out myself."

"You!" she exclaimed in surprise ; for she knew the great interest he had shown in watching the habits of the young hawks that had been captured by a shepherd lad.

"Yes ; I let them out last night. It was a pity to have them caged up."

"So long as it was yourself, it is all right," she said ; and then she was going away. But she paused and turned, and said to him, with a smile, "And I think you should let yourself escape, too, Keith, for it is you too that are caged up ; and perhaps you feel it now more since you have been to London. And if you are thinking of your friends in London, why should you not go for another visit to the South before you settle down to the long winter ?"

For an instant he regarded her with some fear. Had she guessed his secret ? Had she been watching the outward signs of this constant torture he had been suffering ? Had she surmised that the otter-skins about which he had asked her advice were not consigned to any one of the married ladies whose acquaintance he had made in the South, and of whom he had chatted freely enough in Castle Dare ? Or was this merely a passing suggestion thrown out by one who was always on the lookout to do a kindness ?

"Well, I would like to go, Janet," he said, but with no gladness in his voice ; "and it is not more than a week or two I should like to be away ; but I do not think the mother would like it ; and it is enough money I have spent this year already——"

"There is no concern about the money, Keith," said she, simply, "since you have not touched what I gave you. And if you are set upon it, you know auntie will agree to whatever you wish."

"But how can I explain to her? It is unreasonable to be going away."

How, indeed, could he explain? He was almost assuming that those gentle eyes now fixed on him could read his heart, and that she would come to aid him in his suffering without any further speech from him. And that was precisely what Janet Macleod did—whether or not she had guessed the cause of his desire to get away.

"If you were a schoolboy, Keith, you would be cleverer at making an excuse for playing truant," she said, laughing. "And I could make one for you now."

"You?"

"I will not call it an excuse, Keith," she said, "because I think you would be doing a good work; and I will bear the expense of it, if you please."

He looked more puzzled than ever.

"When we were at Salen yesterday I saw Major Stuart, and he has just came back from Dunrobin. And he was saying very great things about the machine for the drying of crops in wet weather, and he said he would like to go to England to see the newer ones and all the later improvements, if there was a chance of any one about here going shares with them. And it would not be very much, Keith, if you were to share with him; and the machine it can be moved about very well; and in the bad weather you could give the cotters some help, to say nothing about our own hay and corn. And that is what Major Stuart was saying yesterday, that if there was any place that you wanted a drying-machine for the crops it was in Mull."

"I have been thinking of it myself," he said, absently, "but our farm is too small to make it pay——"

"But if Major Stuart will take half the expense? And even if you lost a little, Keith, you would save a great deal to the poorer people who are continually losing their little patches of crops. And will you go and be my agent, Keith, to go and see whether it is practicable?"

"They will not thank you, Janet, for letting them have this help for nothing."

"They shall not have it for nothing," said she—for she had plenty of experience in dealing with the poorer folk around—"they must pay for the fuel that is used. And now, Keith, if it is a holiday you want, will not that be a very good holiday, and one to be used for a very good purpose, too?"

She left him. Where was the eager joy with which he

ought to have accepted this offer? Here was the very means placed within his reach of satisfying the craving desire of his heart; and yet, all the same, he seemed to shrink back with a vague and undefined dread. A thousand impalpable fears and doubts beset his mind. He had grown timid as a woman. The old happy audacity had been destroyed by sleepless nights and a torturing anxiety. It was a new thing for Keith Macleod to have become a prey to strange unintelligible forebodings.

But he went and saw Major Stuart—a round, red, jolly little man, with white hair and a cheerful smile, who had a sombre and melancholy wife. Major Stuart received Macleod's offer with great gravity. It was a matter of business that demanded serious consideration. He had worked out the whole system of drying crops with hot air as it was shown him in pamphlets, reports, and agricultural journals, and he had come to the conclusion that—on paper at least—it could be made to pay. What was wanted was to give the thing a practical trial. If the system was sound, surely any one who helped to introduce it into the Western Highlands was doing a very good work indeed. And there was nothing but personal inspection could decide on the various merits of latest improvements.

This was what he said before his wife one night at dinner. But when the ladies had left the room, the little stout major suddenly put up both his hands, snapped his thumb and middle finger, and very cleverly executed one or two reel steps.

"By George! my boy," said he, with a ferocious grin on his face, "I think we will have a little frolic—a little frolic!—a little frolic! You were never shut up in a house for six months with a woman like my wife, were you, Macleod? You were never reminded of your coffin every morning, were you? Macleod, my boy, I am just mad to get after those drying-machines!"

And indeed Macleod could not have had a merrier companion to go South with him than this rubicund major just escaped from the thralldom of his wife. But it was with no such high spirits that Macleod set out. Perhaps it was only the want of sleep that had rendered him nerveless and morbid; but he felt, as he left Castle Dare, that there was a lie in his actions, if not in his words. And as for the future that lay before him, it was a region only of doubt, and vague

regrets, and unknown fears ; and he was entering upon it without any glimpse of light, and without the guidance of any friendly hand.

CHAPTER XX.

OTTER-SKINS.

"AH, pappy," said Miss Gertrude White to her father—and she pretended to sigh as she spoke—"this is a change indeed !"

They were driving up to the gate of the small cottage in South Bank. It was the end of October. In the gardens they passed the trees were almost bare ; though such leaves as hung sparsely on the branches of the chestnuts and maples were ablaze with russet and gold in the misty sunshine.

"In another week," she continued, "there will not be a leaf left. I dare say there is not a single geranium in the garden. All hands on deck to pipe a farewell :

'Ihr Matten, lebt wohl,
Ihr sonnigen Weiden
Der Senne muss scheiden,
Der Sommer ist hin.'

Farewell to the blue mountains of Newcastle, and the sunlit valleys of Liverpool, and the silver waterfalls of Leeds ; the summer is indeed over ; and a very nice and pleasant summer we have had of it."

The flavor of sarcasm running through this affected sadness vexed Mr. White, and he answered, sharply,

"I think you have little reason to grumble over a tour which has so distinctly added to your reputation."

"I was not aware," said she, with a certain careless sauciness of manner, "that an actress was allowed to have a reputation ; at least, there are always plenty of people anxious enough to take it away."

"Gertrude," said he, sternly, "what do you mean by this constant carping ? Do you wish to cease to be an actress ? or what in all the world do you want ?"

"To cease to be an actress ?" she said, with a mild won

der, and with the sweetest of smiles, as she prepared to get out of the open door of the cab. "Why, don't you know; pappy, that a leopard cannot change his spots, or an Etheopian his skin? Take care of the step, pappy! That's right. Come here, Marie, and give the cabman a hand with this portmantau."

Miss White was not grumbling at all—but, on the contrary, was quite pleasant and cheerful—when she entered the small house and found herself once more at home.

"Oh, Carry," she said, when her sister followed her into her room; "you don't know what it is to get back home, after having been bandied from one hotel to another hotel, and from one lodging-house to another lodging-house, for goodness knows how long."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Carry, with such marked coldness that her sister turned to her.

"What is the matter with you?"

"What is the matter with *you*?" the younger sister retorted, with sudden fire. "Do you know that your letters to me have been quite disgraceful?"

"You are crazed, child—you wrote something about it the other day—I could not make out what you meant," said Miss White; and she went to the glass to see that the beautiful brown hair had not been too much disarranged by the removal of her bonnet.

"It is you are crazed, Gertrude White," said Carry, who had apparently picked up from some melodrama the notion that it was rather effective to address a person by her full name. "I am really ashamed of you—that you should have let yourself be bewitched by a parcel of beasts' skins. I declare that your ravings about the Highlands, and fairies, and trash of that sort, have been only fit for a penny journal—"

Miss White turned and stared—as well she might. This indignant person of fourteen had flashing eyes and a visage of wrath. The pale, calm, elder sister only remarked, in that deep-toned and gentle voice of hers,

"Your language is pretty considerably strong, Carry. I don't know what has aroused such a passion in you. Because I wrote to you about the Highlands? Because I sent you that collection of legends? Because it seemed to me, when I was in a wretched hotel in some dirty town, I would rather be away yachting or driving with some one of the various parties of people whom I know, and who had mostly gone to Scotland this year? If you are jealous of the High-

lands, Carry, I will undertake to root out the name of every mountain and lake that has got hold of my affections."

She was turning away again, with a quiet smile on her face, when her younger sister arrested her.

"What's that?" said she, so sharply, and extending her forefinger so suddenly, that Gertrude almost shrank back.

"What's what?" she said, in dismay—fearing, perhaps, to hear of an adder being on her shoulder.

"You know perfectly well," said Miss Carry, vehemently, "it is the Macleod tartan!"

Now the truth was that Miss White's travelling-dress was of an unrelieved gray; the only scrap of color about her costume being a tiny thread of tartan ribbon that just showed in front of her collar.

"The Macleod tartan?" said the eldest sister, demurely. "And what if it were the Macleod tartan?"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Gerty! There was quite enough occasion for people to talk in the way he kept coming here; and now you make a parade of it; you ask people to look at you wearing a badge of servitude—you say, 'Oh, here I am; and I am quite ready to be your wife when you ask me, Sir Keith Macleod!'"

There was no flush of anger in the fair and placid face; but rather a look of demure amusement in the downcast eyes.

"Dear me, Carry!" said she, with great innocence, "the profession of an actress must be looking up in public estimation when such a rumor as that could even get into existence. And so people have been so kind as to suggest that Sir Keith Macleod, the representative of one of the oldest and proudest families in the kingdom, would not be above marrying a poor actress who has her living to earn, and who is supported by the half-crowns and half-sovereigns of the public? And indeed I think it would look very well to have him loitering about the stage-doors of provincial theatres until his wife should be ready to come out; and would he bring his gillies, and keepers, and head-foresters, and put them into the pit to applaud her? Really, the role you have cut out for a Highland gentleman——"

"A Highland gentleman!" exclaimed Carry. "A Highland pauper! But you are quite right, Gerty, to laugh at the rumor. Of course it is quite ridiculous. It is quite ridiculous to think that an actress whose fame is all over England—who is sought after by everybody, and the popular favorite ever seen—would give up everything and

go away and marry an ignorant Highland savage, and look after his calves and his cows and hens for him. That is indeed ridiculous, Gerty."

"Very well, then, put it out of your mind; and never let me hear another word about it," said the popularest favorite, as she undid the bit of tartan ribbon; "and if it is any great comfort to you to know, this is not the Macleod tartan but the MacDougal tartan, and you may put it in the fire if you like."

Saying which, she threw the bit of costume which had given so great offence on the table. The discomfited Carry looked at it, but would not touch it. At last she said,

"Where are the skins, Gerty?"

"Near Castle Dare," answered Miss White, turning to get something else for her neck; "there is a steep hill, and the road comes over it. When you climb to the top of the hill and sit down, the fairies will carry you right to the bottom if you are in a proper frame of mind. But they won't appear at all unless you are at peace with all men. I will show you the skins when you are in a proper frame of mind, Carry."

"Who told you that story?" she asked quickly.

"Sir Keith Macleod," the elder sister said, without thinking.

"Then he has been writing to you?"

"Certainly."

She marched out of the room. Gertrude White, unconscious of the fierce rage she had aroused, carelessly proceeded with her toilet, trying now one flower and now another in the ripples of her sun-brown hair, but finally discarding these half-withered things for a narrow band of blue velvet.

"Threescore o' nobles rode up the king's ha',"

she was numming thoughtlessly to herself as she stood with her hands uplifted to her head, revealing the beautiful lines of her figure,

"But Bonnie Glenogie's the flower o' them a';
Wi' his milk-white steed and his coal-black e'e:
Glenogie, dear mither, Glenogie for me!"

At length she had finished, and was ready to proceed to her immediate work of overhauling domestic affairs. When

Keith Macleod was struck by the exceeding neatness and perfection of arrangement in this small house, he was in nowise the victim of any stage-effect. Gertrude White was at all times and in all seasons a precise and accurate house-mistress. Harassed, as an actress must often be, by other cares; sometimes exhausted with hard work; perhaps tempted now and again by the self-satisfaction of a splendid triumph to let meaner concerns go unheeded; all the same, she allowed nothing to interfere with her domestic duties.

"Gerty," her father said, impatiently, to her a day or two before they left London for the provinces, "what is the use of your going down to these stores yourself? Surely you can send Jane or Marie. You really waste far too much time over the veriest trifles: how can it matter what sort of mustard we have?"

"And, indeed, I am glad to have something to convince me that I am a human being and a woman," she had said, instantly, "something to be myself in. I believe Providence intended me to be the manager of a Swiss hotel."

This was one of the first occasions on which she had revealed to her father that she had been thinking a good deal about her lot in life, and was perhaps beginning to doubt whether the struggle to become a great and famous actress was the only thing worth living for. But he paid little attention to it at the time. He had a vague impression that it was scarcely worth discussing about. He was pretty well convinced that his daughter was clever enough to argue herself into any sort of belief about herself, if she should take some fantastic notion into her head. It was not until that night in Manchester that he began to fear there might be something serious in these expressions of discontent.

On this bright October morning Miss Gertrude White was about to begin her domestic inquiries, and was leaving her room humming cheerfully to herself something about the bonnie Glenogie of the song, when she was again stopped by her sister, who was carrying a bundle.

"I have got the skins," she said, gloomily. "Jane took them out."

"Will you look at them?" the sister said, kindly. "They are very pretty. If they were not a present, I would give them to you, to make a jacket of them."

"I wear them?" said she. "Not likely!"

Nevertheless she had sufficient womanly curiosity to let

her elder sister open the parcel ; and then she took up the otter-skins one by one, and looked at them.

"I don't think much of them," she said.

The other bore this taunt patiently.

"They are only big moles, aren't they? And I thought moleskin was only worn by working-people."

"I am a working-person too," Miss Gertrude White said ; "but, in any case, I think a jacket of these skins will look lovely."

"Oh, do you think so? Well, you can't say much for the smell of them."

"It is no more disagreeable than the smell of a sealskin jacket."

She laid down the last of the skins with some air of disdain.

"It will be a nice series of trophies, anyway—showing you know some one who goes about spending his life in killing inoffensive animals."

"Poor Sir Keith Macleod ! What has he done to offend you, Carry ?"

Miss Carry turned her head away for a minute ; but presently she boldly faced her sister.

"Gerty, you don't mean to marry a beauty man !"

Gerty looked considerably puzzled ; but her companion continued, vehemently,—

"How often have I heard you say you would never marry a beauty man—a man who has been brought up in front of the looking-glass—who is far too well satisfied with his own good looks to think of anything or anybody else ! Again and again you have said that, Gertrude White. You told me, rather than marry a self-satisfied coxcomb, you would marry a misshapen, ugly little man, so that he would worship you all the days of your life for your condescension and kindness."

"Very well, then !"

"And what is Sir Keith Macleod but a beauty man ?"

"He is not !" and for once the elder sister betrayed some feeling in the proud tone of her voice. "He is the manliest-looking man that I have ever seen ; and I have seen a good many more men than you. There is not a man you know whom he could not throw across the canal down there. Sir Keith Macleod a beauty man !—I think he could take on a good deal more polishing, and curling, and smoothing without any great harm. If I was in any danger, I know which of all the men I have seen I would rather

have in front of me—with his arms free; and I don't suppose he would be thinking of any looking-glass! If you want to know about the race he represents, read English history, and the story of England's wars. If you go to India, or China, or Africa, or the Crimea, you will hear something about the Macleods, I think!"

Carry began to cry.

"You silly thing, what is the matter with you?" Gertrude White exclaimed; but of course her arm was round her sister's neck.

"It is true, then."

"What is true?"

"What people say."

"What do people say?"

"That you will marry Sir Keith Macleod."

"Carry!" she said, angrily, "I can't imagine who has been repeating such idiotic stories to you. I wish people would mind their own business. Sir Keith Macleod marry me!"

"Do you mean to say he has never asked you?" Carry said, disengaging herself, and fixing her eyes on her sister's face.

"Certainly not!" was the decided answer; but all the same, Miss Gertrude White's forehead and cheeks flushed slightly.

"Then you know that he means to; and that is why you have been writing to me, day after day, about the romance of the Highlands, and fairy stories, and the pleasure of people who could live without caring for the public. Oh, Gerty, why won't you be frank with me, and let me know the worst at once?"

"If I gave you a box on the ears," she said, laughing, "that would be the worst at once; and I think it would serve you right for listening to such tittle-tattle and letting your head be filled with nonsense. Haven't you sufficient sense to know that you ought not to compel me to speak of such a thing—absurd as it is? I cannot go on denying that I am about to become the wife of Tom, Dick, or Harry; and you know the stories that have been going about for years past. Who was I last? The wife of a Russian nobleman who gambled away all my earnings at Homburg. You are fourteen now, Carry; you should have more sense."

Miss Carry dried her eyes; but she mournfully shook her head. There were the otter-skins lying on the table.

She had seen plenty of the absurd paragraphs about her sister which good-natured friends had cut out of provincial and foreign papers and forwarded to the small family at South Bank. But the mythical Russian nobleman had never sent a parcel of otter-skins. These were palpable and not to be explained away. She sorrowfully left the room, unconvinced.

And now Miss Gertrude White set to work with a will; and no one who was only familiar with her outside her own house would have recognized in this shifty, practical, industrious person, who went so thoroughly into all the details of the small establishment, the lady who, when she went abroad among the gayeties of the London season, was so eagerly sought after, and flattered, and petted, and made the object of all manner of delicate attentions. Her father, who suspected that her increased devotion to these domestic duties was but part of that rebellious spirit she had recently betrayed, had nevertheless to confess that there was no one but herself whom he could trust to arrange his china and dust his curiosities. And how could he resent her giving instructions to the cook, when it was his own dinner that profited thereby?

"Well, Gerty," he said that evening after dinner, "what do you think about Mr.—'s offer? It is very good-natured of him to let you have the ordering of the drawing-room scene, for you can have the furniture and the color to suit your own costume."

"Indeed I shall have nothing whatever to do with it," said she, promptly. "The furniture at home is enough for me. I don't wish to become the upholsterer of a theatre."

"You are very ungrateful, then. Half the effect of a modern comedy is lost because the people appear in rooms which resemble nothing at all that people ever lived in. Here is a man who gives you *carte blanche* to put a modern drawing-room on the stage; and your part would gain infinitely from having real surroundings. I consider it a very flattering offer."

"And perhaps it is, pappy," said she, "but I think I do enough if I get through my own share of the work. And it is very silly of him to want me to introduce a song into this part, too. He knows I can't sing—"

"Gerty!" her sister said.

"Oh, you know as well as I. I can get through a song well enough in a room; but I have not enough voice for a

theatre ; and although he says it is only to make the drawing-room scene more realistic—and that I need not sing to the front—that is all nonsense. I know what it is meant for—to catch the gallery. Now I refuse to sing for the gallery.”

This was decided enough.

“What was the song you put into your last part, Gerty ?” her sister asked. “I saw something in the papers about it.”

“It was a Scotch one, Carry ; I don’t think you know it.”

“I wonder it was not a Highland one,” her sister said, rather spitefully.

“Oh, I have a whole collection of Highland ones now. would you like to hear one ? Would you, pappy ?”

She went and fetched the book, and opened the piano.

“It is an old air that belonged to Scarba,” she said, and then she sang, simply and pathetically enough, the somewhat stiff and cumbrous English translation of the Gaelic words. It was the song of the exiled Mary Macleod, who, sitting on the shores of “sea-worn Mull,” looks abroad on the lonely islands of Scarba, and Islay, and Jura, and laments that she is far away from her own home.

“How do you like it, pappy ?” she said, when she had finished. “It is a pity I do not know the Gaelic. They say that when the chief heard these verses repeated, he let the old woman go back to her own home.”

One of the two listeners, at all events, did not seem to be particularly struck by the pathos of Mary Macleod’s lament. She walked up to the piano.

“Where did you get that book, Gerty ?” she said, in a firm voice.

“Where ?” said the other, innocently. “In Manchester, I think it was, I bought it.”

But before she had made the explanation, Miss Carry, convinced that this, too, had come from her enemy, had seized the book and turned to the title-page. Neither on title-page nor on fly-leaf, however, was there any inscription.

“Did you think it had come with the otter-skins, Carry ?” the elder sister said, laughing ; and the younger one retired, baffled and chagrined, but none the less resolved that before Gertrude White completely gave herself up to this blind infatuation for a savage country and for one of its worthless inhabitants, she would have to run the gauntlet of many a sharp word of warning and reproach.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN LONDON AGAIN.

ON through the sleeping counties rushed the train—passing woods, streams, fertile valleys, and clustering villages, all palely shrouded in the faint morning mist that had a sort of suffused and hidden sunlight in it: the world had not yet awoke. But Macleod knew that, ere he reached London people would be abroad; and he almost shrank from meeting the look of these thousands of eager faces. Would not some of them guess his errand? Would he not be sure to run against a friend of hers—an acquaintance of his own? It was with a strange sense of fear that he stepped out and on to the platform at Euston Station; he glanced up and down: if she were suddenly to confront his eyes! A day or two ago it seemed as if innumerable leagues of ocean lay between him and her, so that the heart grew sick with thinking of the distance; now that he was in the same town with her, he felt so close to her that he could almost hear her breathe.

Major Stuart has enjoyed a sound night's rest, and was now possessed of quite enough good spirits and loquacity for two. He scarcely observed the silence of his companion. Together they rattled away through this busy, eager, immense throng, until they got down to the comparative quiet of Bury Street: and here they were fortunate enough to find not only that Macleod's old rooms were unoccupied, but that his companion could have the corresponding chambers on the floor above. They changed their attire; had breakfast; and then proceeded to discuss their plans for the day. Major Stuart observed that he was in no hurry to investigate the last modifications of the drying-machines. It would be necessary to write and appoint an interview before going down into Essex. He had several calls to make in London; if Macleod did not see him before, they should meet at seven for dinner. Macleod saw him depart without any great regret.

When he himself went outside it was already noon, but the sun had not yet broken through the mist, and London seemed cold, and lifeless; and deserted. He did not know of any one of his former friends being left in the great and

lonely city. He walked along Piccadilly, and saw how many of the houses were shut up. The beautiful foliage of the Green Park had vanished ; and here and there a red leaf hung on a withered branch. And yet, lonely as he felt in walking through this crowd of strangers, he was nevertheless possessed with a nervous and excited fear that at any moment he might have to quail before the inquiring glance of a certain pair of calm, large eyes. Was this, then, really Keith Macleod who was haunted by these fantastic troubles ? Had he so little courage that he dared not go boldly up to her house and hold out his hand to her ? As he walked along this thoroughfare, he was looking far ahead ; and when any tall and slender figure appeared that might by any possibility be taken for hers, he watched it with a nervous interest that had something of dread in it. So much for the high courage born of love !

It was with some sense of relief that he entered Hyde Park, for here there were fewer people. And as he walked on, the day brightened. A warmer light began to suffuse the pale mist lying over the black-green masses of rhododendrons, the leafless trees, the damp grassplots, the empty chairs ; and as he was regarding a group of people on horseback who, almost at the summit of the red hill, seemed about to disappear into the mist, behold ! a sudden break in the sky ; a silvery gleam shot athwart from the south, so that these distant figures grew almost black ; and presently the frail sunshine of November was streaming all over the red ride and the raw green of the grass. His spirits rose somewhat. When he reached the Serpentine, the sunlight was shining on the rippling blue water ; and there were pert young ladies of ten or twelve feeding the ducks ; and away on the other side there was actually an island amidst the blue ripples ; and the island, if it was not as grand as Staffa nor as green as Ulva, was nevertheless an island, and it was pleasant enough to look at, with its bushes, and boats, and white swans. And then he bethought him of his first walks by the side of this little lake—when Oscar was the only creature in London he had to concern himself with—when each new day was only a brighter holiday than its predecessor—when he was of opinion that London was the happiest and most beautiful place in the world ; and of that bright morning, too, when he walked through the empty streets at dawn, and came to the peacefully flowing river.

These idle meditations were suddenly interrupted. Away

along the bank of the lake his keen eye could make out a figure, which, even at that distance, seemed so much to resemble one he knew, that his heart began to beat quick. Then the dress—all of black, with a white hat and white gloves; was not that of the simplicity that had always so great an attraction for her? And he knew that she was singularly fond of Kensington Gardens; and might she not be going thither for a stroll before going back to the Piccadilly Theatre? He hastened his steps. He soon began to gain on the stranger; and the nearer he got the more it seemed to him that he recognized the graceful walk and carriage of this slender woman. She passed under the archway of the bridge. When she had emerged from the shadow, she paused for a moment or two to look at the ducks on the lake; and this arch of shadow seemed to frame a beautiful sunlit picture—the single figure against a background of green bushes. And if this were indeed she, how splendid the world would all become in a moment! In his eagerness of anticipation he forgot his fear. What would she say? Was he to hear her laugh once more, and take her hand? Alas! when he got close enough to make sure, he found that his beautiful figure belonged to a somewhat pretty, middle-aged lady, who had brought a bag of scraps with her to feed the ducks. The world grew empty again. He passed on, in a sort of dream. He only knew he was in Kensington Gardens; and that once or twice he had walked with her down those broad alleys in the happy summer-time of flowers, and sunshine, and the scent of limes. Now there was a pale blue mist in the open glades; and a gloomy purple instead of the brilliant green of the trees; and the cold wind that came across rustled the masses of brown orange leaves that were lying scattered on the ground. He got a little more interested when he neared the Round Pond; for the wind had freshened; and there were several handsome craft out there on the raging deep, braving well the sudden squalls that laid them right on their beam-ends, and then let them come staggering and dripping up to windward. But there were two small boys there who had brought with them a tiny vessel of home-made build, with a couple of lugsails, a jib, and no rudder; and it was a great disappointment to them that this nondescript craft would move, if it moved at all, in an uncertain circle. Macleod came to their assistance—got a bit of floating stick, and carved out of it a rude rudder, altered the sails, and altogether put the ship into such sea-going trim that, when she

was fairly launched, she kept a pretty good course for the other side, where doubtless she arrived in safety, and discharged her passengers and cargo. He was almost sorry to part with the two small ship-owners. They almost seemed to him the only people he knew in London.

But surely he had not come all the way from Castle Dare to walk about Kensington Gardens! What had become of that intense longing to see her—to hear her speak—that had made his life at home a constant torment and misery? Well, it still held possession of him; but all the same there was this indefinable dread that held him back. Perhaps he was afraid that he would have to confess to her the true reason for his having come to London. Perhaps he feared he might find her something entirely different from the creature of his dreams. At all events as he returned to his room and sat down by himself to think over all the things that might accrue from this step of his, he only got farther and farther into a haze of nervous indecision. One thing only was clear to him: with all his hatred and jealousy of the theatre, to the theatre that night he would have to go. He could not know that she was so near to him—that at a certain time and place he would certainly see her and listen to her—without going. He bethought him, moreover, of what he had once heard her say—that while she could fairly well make out the people in the galleries and boxes, those who were sitting in the stalls close to the orchestra were, by reason of the glare of the foot-lights, quite invisible to her. Might he not, then, get into some corner where, himself unseen, he might be so near to her that he could almost stretch out his hand to her and take her hand, and tell, by its warmth and throbbing, that it was a real woman, and not a dream, that filled his heart?

Major Stuart was put off by some excuse, and at eight o'clock Macleod walked up to the theatre. He drew near with some apprehension; it almost seemed to him as though the man in the box-office recognized him, and knew the reason for his demanding one of those stalls. He got it easily enough; there was no great run on the new piece, even though Miss Gertrude White was the heroine. He made his way along the narrow corridors; he passed into the glare of the house; he took his seat with his ears dinning by the loud music, and waited. He paid no heed to his neighbors; he had already twisted up the programme so that he could not

have read it if he had wished ; he was aware mostly of a sort of slightly choking sensation about the throat.

When Gertrude White did appear—she came in unexpectedly—he almost uttered a cry ; and it would have been a cry of delight. For there was a flesh and blood woman, a thousand times more interesting, and beautiful, and lovable than all his fancied pictures of her. Look how she walks—how simply and gracefully she takes off her hat and places it on the table ! Look at the play of light, and life, and gladness on her face—at the eloquence of her eyes ! He had been thinking of her eyes as too calmly observant and serious : he saw them now, and was amazed at the difference—they seemed to have so much clear light in them, and pleasant laughter. He did not fear at all that she should see him. She was so near—he wished he could take her hand and lead her away. What concern had these people around with her ? This was Gertrude White—whom he knew. She was a friend of Mrs. Ross's ; she lived in a quiet little home, with an affectionate and provoking sister ; she had a great admiration for Oscar the collie ; she had the whitest hand in the world as she offered you some salad at the small, neat table. What was she doing here—amidst all this glaring sham—before all these people ? “ *Come away quickly !* ” his heart cried to her. “ *Quick—quick—let us get away together : there is some mistake—some illusion : outside you will breathe the fresh air, and get into the reality of the world again ; and you will ask about Oscar, and young Ogilvie : and one might hold your hand—your real warm hand—and perhaps hold it tight, and not give it up to any one whatsoever !* ” His own hand was trembling with excitement. The eagerness of delight with which he listened to every word uttered by the low-toned and gentle voice was almost painful ; and yet he knew it not. He was as one demented. This was Gertrude White—speaking, walking, smiling, a fire of beauty in her clear eyes ; her parted lips when she laughed letting the brilliant light just touch for an instant the milk-white teeth. This was no pale Rose Leaf at all—no dream or vision—but the actual laughing, talking, beautiful woman, who had more than ever of that strange grace and witchery about her that had fascinated him when first he saw her. She was so near that he could have thrown a rose to her—a red rose, full blown and full scented. He forgave the theatre—or rather he forgot it—in the unimaginable delight of being so near her. And when at length she

left the stage, he had no jealousy of the poor people who remained there to go through their marionette business. He hoped they might all become great actors and actresses. He even thought he would try to get to understand the story—seeing he should have nothing else to do until Gertrude White came back again.

Now Keith Macleod was no more ignorant or innocent than anybody else ; but there was one social misdemeanor—a mere peccadillo, let us say—that was quite unintelligible to him. He could not understand how a man could go flirting after a married woman ; and still less could he understand how a married woman should, instead of attending to her children and her house and such matters, make herself ridiculous by aping girlhood and pretending to have a lover. He had read a great deal about this, and he was told it was common ; but he did not believe it. The same authorities assured him that the women of England were drunkards in secret ; he did not believe it. The same authorities insisted that the sole notion of marriage that occupied the head of an English girl of our own day was as to how she should sell her charms to the highest bidder ; he did not believe that either. And indeed he argued with himself, in considering to what extent books and plays could be trusted in such matters, that in one obvious case the absurdity of these allegations was proved. If France were the France of French playwrights and novelists, the whole business of the country would come to a standstill. If it was the sole and constant occupation of every adult Frenchman to run after his neighbor's wife, how could bridges be built, taxes collected, fortifications planned ? Surely a Frenchman must sometimes think, if only by accident, of something other than his neighbor's wife ? Macleod laughed to himself in the solitude of Castle Dare, and contemptuously flung the unfinished paper-covered novel aside.

But what was his surprise and indignation—his shame, even—on finding that this very piece in which Gertrude White was acting was all about a jealous husband, and a gay and thoughtless wife, and a villain who did not at all silently plot her ruin, but frankly confided his aspirations to a mutual friend, and rather sought for sympathy ; while she, Gertrude White herself, had, before all these people, to listen to advances which, in her innocence, she was not supposed to understand. As the play proceeded, his brows grew darker and darker. And the husband, who ought to have been the

guardian of his wife's honor? Well, the husband in this rather poor play was a creation that is common in modern English drama. He represented one idea at least that the English playwright has certainly not borrowed from the French stage. Moral worth is best indicated by a sullen demeanor. The man who has a pleasant manner is dangerous and a profligate; the virtuous man—the true-hearted Englishman—conducts himself as a boor, and proves the goodness of his nature by his silence and his sulks. The hero of this trumpery piece was of this familiar type. He saw the gay fascinator coming about his house; but he was too proud and dignified to interfere. He knew of his young wife becoming the byword of his friends; but he only clasped his hands on his forehead, and sought solitude, and scowled as a man of virtue should. Macleod had paid but little attention to stories of this kind when he had merely read them; but when the situation was visible—when actual people were before him—the whole thing looked more real, and his sympathies became active enough. How was it possible, he thought, for this poor dolt to fume and mutter, and let his innocent wife go her own way alone and unprotected, when there was a door in the room, and a window by way of alternative? There was one scene in which the faithless friend and the young wife were together in her drawing-room. He drew nearer to her; he spake softly to her; he ventured to take her hand. And while he was looking up appealingly to her, Macleod was regarding his face. He was calculating to himself the precise spot between the eyes where a man's knuckles would most effectually tell; and his hand was clinched, and his teeth set hard. There was a look on his face which would have warned any gay young man that when Macleod should marry, his wife would need no second champion.

But was this the atmosphere by which she was surrounded? It is needless to say that the piece was proper enough. Virtue was triumphant; vice compelled to sneak off discomfited. The indignant outburst of shame, and horror, and contempt on the part of the young wife, when she came to know what the villain's suave intentions really meant, gave Miss White an excellent opportunity of displaying her histrionic gifts; and the public applauded vehemently; but Macleod had no pride in her triumph. He was glad when the piece ended—when the honest-hearted Englishman so far recovered speech as to declare that his confidence in his wife was restored, and so far forgot his stolidity of face and de-

meanor as to point out to the villain the way to the door instead of kicking him thither. Macleod breathed more freely when he knew that Gertrude White was now about to go away to the shelter and quiet of her own home. He went back to his rooms, and tried to forget the precise circumstances in which he had just seen her.

But not to forget herself. A new gladness filled his heart when he thought of her—thought of her not now as a dream or a vision, but as the living and breathing woman whose musical laugh seemed still to be ringing in his ears. He could see her plainly—the face all charged with life and loveliness; the clear bright eyes that he had no longer any fear of meeting; the sweet mouth with its changing smiles. When Major Stuart came home that night he noticed a most marked change in the manner of his companion. Macleod was excited, eager, talkative; full of high spirits and friendliness; he joked his friend about his playing truant from his wife. He was anxious to know all about the major's adventures, and pressed him to have but one other cigar, and vowed that he would take him on the following evening to the only place in London where a good dinner could be had. There was gladness in his eyes, a careless satisfaction in his manner; he was ready to do anything, go anywhere. This was more like the Macleod of old. Major Stuart came to the conclusion that the atmosphere of London had had a very good effect on his friend's spirits.

When Macleod went to bed that night there were wild and glad desires and resolves in his brain that might otherwise have kept him awake but for the fatigue he had lately endured. He slept, and he dreamed; and the figure that he saw in his dreams—though she was distant, somehow—had a look of tenderness in her eyes, and she held a red rose in her hand.

CHAPTER XXII.

DECLARATION.

NOVEMBER though it was, next morning broke brilliantly over London. There was a fresh west wind blowing; there was a clear sunshine filling the thoroughfares; if one were on

the lookout for picturesqueness even in Bury Street, was there not a fine touch of color where the softly red chimney-pots rose far away into the blue? It was not possible to have always around one the splendor of the northern sea.

And Macleod would not listen to a word his friend had to say concerning the important business that had brought them both to London.

"To-night, man—to-night—we will arrange it all to-night," he would say, and there was a nervous excitement about his manner for which the major could not at all account.

"Sha'n't I see you till the evening, then?" he asked.

"No," Macleod said, looking anxiously out of the window, as if he feared some thunder-storm would suddenly shut out the clear light of this beautiful morning. "I don't know—perhaps I may be back before—but at any rate we meet at seven. You will remember—seven?"

"Indeed I am not likely to forget it," his companion said, for he had been told about five-and-thirty times.

It was about eleven o'clock when Macleod left the house. There was a grateful freshness about the morning even here in the middle of London. People looked cheerful; Piccadilly was thronged with idlers come out to enjoy the sunshine; there was still a leaf or two fluttering on the trees in the square. Why should this man go eagerly tearing away northward in a hansom—with an anxious and absorbed look on his face—when everybody seemed inclined to saunter leisurely along, breathing the sweet wind, and feeling the sunlight on their cheek?

It was scarcely half-past eleven when Macleod got out of the hansom, and opened a small gate, and walked up to the door of a certain house. He was afraid she had already gone. He was afraid she might resent his calling at so unusual an hour. He was afraid—of a thousand things. And when at last the trim maid-servant told him that Miss White was within, and asked him to step into the drawing-room, it was almost as one in a dream that he followed her. As one in a dream, truly; but nevertheless he saw every object around him with a marvellous vividness. Next day he could recollect every feature of the room—the empty fireplace, the black-framed mirror, the Chinese fans, the small cabinets with their shelves of blue and white, and the large open book on the table, with a bit of tartan lying on it. These things seemed to impress themselves on his eyesight involuntarily; for he was in reality intently listening for a soft footfall outside the

door. He went forward to this open book. It was a volume of a work on the Highland clans—a large and expensive work that was not likely to belong to Mr. White. And this colored figure? It was the representative of the clan Macleod: and this bit of cloth that lay on the open book was of the Macleod tartan. He withdrew quickly, as though he had stumbled on some dire secret. He went to the window. He saw only leafless trees now, and withered flowers; with the clear sunshine touching the sides of houses and walls that had in the summer months been quite invisible.

There was a slight noise behind him; he turned, and all the room seemed filled with a splendor of light and of life as she advanced to him—the clear, beautiful eyes full of gladness, the lips smiling, the hand frankly extended. And of a sudden his heart sank. Was it indeed of her,

“The glory of life, the beauty of the world,”

that he had dared to dream wild and impossible dreams? He had set out that morning with a certain masterful sense that he would face his fate. He had “taken the world for his pillow,” as the Gaelic stories say. But at this sudden revelation of the incomparable grace, and self-possession, and high loveliness of this beautiful creature, all his courage and hopes fled instantly, and he could only stammer out excuses for his calling so early. He was eagerly trying to make himself out an ordinary visitor. He explained that he did not know but that she might be going to the theatre during the day. He was in London for a short time on business. It was an unconscionable hour.

“But I am so glad to see you!” she said, with a perfect sweetness, and her eyes said more than her words. “I should have been really vexed if I had heard you had passed through London without calling on us. Won’t you sit down?”

As he sat down, she turned for a second, and without any embarrassment shut the big book that had been lying open on the table.

“It is very beautiful weather,” she remarked—there was no tremor about *her* fingers, at all events, as she made secure the brooch that fastened the simple morning-dress at the neck, “only it seems a pity to throw away such beautiful sunshine on withered gardens and bare trees. We have some fine chrysanthemums, though; but I confess I don’t like chrysanthemums myself. They come at a wrong time.

They look unnatural. They only remind one of what is gone. If we are to have winter, we ought to have it out and out. The chrysanthemums always seem to me as if they were making a pretence—trying to make you believe that there was still some life left in the dead garden."

It was very pretty talk, all this about chrysanthemums, uttered in the low-toned, and gentle, and musical voice; but somehow there was a burning impatience in his heart, and a bitter sense of hopelessness, and he felt as though he would cry out in his despair. How could he sit there and listen to talk about chrysanthemums? His hands were tightly clasped together; his heart was throbbing quickly; there was a humming in his ears, as though something there refused to hear about chrysanthemums.

"I—I saw you at the theatre last night," said he.

Perhaps it was the abruptness of the remark that caused the quick blush. She lowered her eyes. But all the same she said, with perfect self-possession,—

"Did you like the piece?"

And he, too: was he not determined to play the part of an ordinary visitor?

"I am not much of a judge," said he, lightly. "The drawing-room scene is very pretty. It is very like a drawing-room. I suppose those are real curtains, and real pictures?"

"Oh yes, it is all real furniture," said she.

Thereafter, for a second, blank silence. Neither dared to touch that deeper stage question that lay next their hearts. But when Keith Macleod, in many a word of timid suggestion, and in the jesting letter he sent her from Castle Dare, had ventured upon that dangerous ground, it was not to talk about the real furniture of a stage drawing-room. However, was not this an ordinary morning call? His manner—his speech—everything said so but the tightly-clasped hands, and perhaps too a certain intensity of look in the eyes, which seemed anxious and constrained.

"Papa, at least, is proud of our chrysanthemums," said Miss White, quickly getting away from the stage question. "He is in the garden now. Will you go out and see him? I am sorry Carry has gone to school."

She rose. He rose also, and he was about to lift his hat from the table, when he suddenly turned to her.

"A drowning man will cry out; how can you prevent his crying out?"

She was startled by the change in the sound of his voice, and still more by the almost haggard look of pain and entreaty in his eyes. He seized her hand; she would have withdrawn it, but she could not.

"You will listen. It is no harm to you. I must speak now, or I will die," said he, quite wildly; "and if you think I am mad, perhaps you are right, but people have pity for a madman. Do you know why I have come to London? It is to see you. I could bear it no longer—the fire that was burning and killing me. Oh, it is no use my saying that it is love for you—I do not know what it is—but only that I must tell you, and you cannot be angry with me—you can only pity me and go away. That is it—it is nothing to you—you can go away."

She burst into tears, and snatched her hand from him, and with both hands covered her face.

"Ah!" said he, "is it pain to you that I should tell you of this madness? But you will forgive me—and you will forget it—and it will not pain you to-morrow or any other day. Surely you are not to blame! Do you remember the days when we became friends? it seems a long time ago, but they were beautiful days, and you were very kind to me, and I was glad I had come to London to make so kind a friend. And it was no fault of yours that I went away with that sickness of the heart; and how could you know about the burning fire, and the feeling that if I did not see you I might as well be dead? And I will call you Gertrude for once only. Gertrude, sit down now—for a moment or two—and do not grieve any more over what is only a misfortune. I want to tell you. After I have spoken, I will go away, and there will be an end of the trouble."

She did sit down; her hands were clasped in piteous despair; he saw the tear drops on the long, beautiful lashes.

"And if the drowning man cries?" said he. "It is only a breath. The waves go over him, and the world is at peace. And oh! do you know that I have taken a strange fancy of late—But I will not trouble you with that; you may hear of it afterward; you will understand, and know you have no blame, and there is an end of trouble. It is quite strange what fancies get into one's head when one is—sick—heart-sick. Do you know what I thought this morning? Will you believe it? Will you let the drowning man cry out in his madness? Why, I said to myself, 'Up now, and have courage! Up now, and be brave, and win a bride as they used to do

in the old stories.' And it was you—it was you—my madness thought of. 'You will tell her,' I said to myself, 'of all the love and the worship you have for her, and your thinking of her by day and by night; and she is a woman, and she will have pity. And then in her surprise—why—' But then you came into the room—it is only a little while ago—but it seems for ever and ever away now—and I have only pained you—"

She sprang to her feet; her face white, her lips proud and determined. And for a second she put her hands on his shoulders; and the wet, full, piteous eyes met his. But as rapidly she withdrew them—almost shuddering—and turned away; and her hands were apart, each clasped, and she bowed her head. Gertrude White had never acted like that on any stage.

And as for him, he stood absolutely dazed for a moment, not daring to think what that involuntary action might mean. He stepped forward, with a pale face and a bewildered air, and caught her hand. Her face she sheltered with the other, and she was sobbing bitterly.

"Gertrude," he said, "what is it? What do you mean?"

The broken voice answered, though her face was turned aside,—

"It is I who am miserable."

"You who are miserable?"

She turned and looked fair into his face, with her eyes all wet, and beautiful, and piteous.

"Can't you see? Don't you understand?" she said "Oh, my good friend! of all the men in the world, you are the very last I would bring trouble to. And I cannot be a hypocrite with you. I feared something of this; and now the misery is that I cannot say to you, 'Here, take my hand. It is yours. You have won your bride.' I cannot do it. If we were both differently situated, it might be otherwise—"

"It might be otherwise!" he exclaimed, with a sudden wonder. "Gertrude, what do you mean? Situated? Is it only that? Look me in the face, now, and as you are a true woman tell me—if we were both free from all situation—if there were no difficulties—nothing to be thought of—could you give yourself to me? Would you really become my wife—you who have all the world flattering you?"

She dared not look him in the face. There was something about the vehemence of his manner that almost terri-

fied her. But she answered bravely, in the sweet, low, trembling voice, and with downcast eyes,—

“If I were to become the wife of any one, it is your wife I would like to be; and I have thought of it. Oh, I cannot be a hypocrite with you when I see the misery I have brought you! And I have thought of giving up all my present life, and all the wishes and dreams I have cherished, and going away and living the simple life of a woman. And under whose guidance would I try that rather than yours? You made me think. But it is all a dream—a fancy. It is impossible. It would only bring misery to you and to me—”

“But why—but why?” he eagerly exclaimed; and there was a new light in his face. “Gertrude, if you can say so much, why not say all? What are obstacles? There can be none if you have the fiftieth part of the love for me that I have for you! Obstacles!” And he laughed with a strange laugh.

She looked up in his face.

“And would it be so great a happiness for you? That would make up for all the trouble I have brought you?” she said, wistfully; and his answer was to take both her hands in his, and there was such a joy in his heart that he could not speak at all. But she only shook her head somewhat sadly, and withdrew her hands, and sat down again by the table.

“It is wrong of me even to think of it,” she said. “To-day I might say ‘yes,’ and to-morrow? You might inspire me with courage now; and afterward—I should only bring you further pain. I do not know myself. I could not be sure of myself. How could I dare drag you into such a terrible risk? It is better as it is. The pain you are suffering will go. You will come to call me your friend; and you will thank me that I refused. Perhaps I shall suffer a little too,” she added, and once more she rather timidly looked up into his face. “You do not know the fascination of seeing your scheme of life, that you have been dreaming about, just suddenly put before you for acceptance; and you want all your common sense to hold back. But I know it will be better—better for both of us. You must believe me.”

“I do not believe you, and I will not believe you,” said he, with a proud light in his eyes; “and now you have said so much I am not going to take any refusal at all. Not now. Gertrude, I have courage for both of us; when you are timid, you will take my hand. Say it, then! A word only! You have already said all but that!”

He seemed scarcely the same man who had appealed to her with the wild eyes and the haggard face. His look was radiant and proud. He spoke with a firm voice; and yet there was a great tenderness in his tone.

"I am sure you love me," she said, in a low voice.

"You will see," he rejoined, with a firm confidence.

"And I am not going to requite your love ill. You are too vehement. You think of nothing but the one end to it all. But I am a woman, and women are taught to be patient. Now you must let me think about all you have said."

"And you do not quite refuse?" said he.

She hesitated for a moment or two.

"I must think for you as well as for myself," she said, in a scarcely audible voice. "Give me time. Give me till the end of the week."

"At this hour I will come."

"And you will believe I have decided for the best—that I have tried hard to be fair to you as well as myself?"

"I know you are too true a woman for anything else," he said; and then he added, "Ah, well, now, you have had enough misery for one morning; you must dry your eyes now, and we will go out into the garden; and if I am not to say anything of all my gratitude to you—why? Because I hope there will be many a year to do that in, my angel of goodness!"

She went to fetch a light shawl and a hat; he kept turning over the things on the table, his fingers trembling, his eyes seeing nothing. If they did see anything, it was a vision of the brown moors near Castle Dare, and a beautiful creature, clad all in cream-color and scarlet, drawing near the great gray stone house.

She came into the room again; joy leaped to his eyes.

"Will you follow me?"

There was a strangely subdued air about her manner as she led him to where her father was; perhaps she was rather tired after the varied emotions she had experienced; perhaps she was still anxious. He was not anxious. It was in a glad way that he addressed the old gentleman who stood there with a spade in his hand.

"It is indeed a beautiful garden," Macleod said, looking round on the withered leaves and damp soil; "no wonder you look after it yourself."

"I am not gardening," the old man said, peevishly. "I have been putting a knife in the ground—burying the hatchet,

you might call it. Fancy! A man sees an old hunting-knife in a shop at Gloucester—a hunting-knife of the time of Charles I., with a beautifully carved ivory handle; and he thinks he will make a present of it to me. What does he do but go and have it ground, and sharpened, and polished until it looks like something sent from Sheffield the day before yesterday!”

“You ought to be very pleased, pappy, you got it at all,” said Gertrude White; but she was looking elsewhere, and rather absently too.

“And so you have buried it to restore the tone?”

“I have,” said the old gentleman, marching off with the shovel to a sort of out house.

Macleod speedily took his leave.

“Saturday next at noon,” said he to her, with no timidity in his voice.

“Yes,” said she, more gently, and with downcast eyes.

He walked away from the house—he knew not whither. He saw nothing around him. He walked hard, sometimes talking to himself. In the afternoon he found himself in a village in Berkshire, close by which, fortunately, there was a railway station; and he had just time to get back to keep his appointment with Major Stuart.

They sat down to dinner.

“Come, now, Macleod, tell me where you have been all day,” said the rosy-faced soldier, carefully tucking his napkin under his chin.

Macleod burst out laughing.

“Another day—another day, Stuart, I will tell you all about it. It is the most ridiculous story you ever heard in your life!”

It was a strange sort of laughing, for there were tears in the younger man’s eyes. But Major Stuart was too busy to notice; and presently they began to talk about the real and serious object of their expedition to London.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RED ROSE.

FROM nervous and unreasoning dread to overweening and extravagant confidence there was but a single bound. After the timid confession she had made, how could he have any further fear? He knew now the answer she must certainly give him. What but the one word "*yes*"—musical as the sound of summer seas—could fitly close and atone for all that long period of doubt and despair? And would she murmur it with the low, sweet voice, or only look it with the clear and lambent eyes? Once uttered, anyhow, surely the glad message would instantly wing its flight away to the far North; and Colonsay would hear; and the green shores of Ulva would laugh; and through all the wild dashing and roaring of the seas there would be a soft ringing as of wedding-bells. The Gometra men will have a good glass that night; and who will take the news to distant Fladda and rouse the lonely Dutchman from his winter sleep? There is a bride coming to Castle Dare!

When Norman Ogilvie had even mentioned marriage, Macleod had merely shaken his head and turned away. There was no issue that way from the wilderness of pain and trouble into which he had strayed. She was already wedded—to that cruel art that was crushing the woman within her. Her ways of life and his were separated as though by unknown oceans. And how was it possible that so beautiful a woman—surrounded by people who petted and flattered her—should not already have her heart engaged? Even if she were free, how could she have bestowed a thought on him—a passing stranger—a summer visitor—the acquaintance of an hour?

But no sooner had Gertrude White, to his sudden wonder, and joy, and gratitude, made that stammering confession, than the impetuosity of his passion leaped at once to the goal. He would not hear of any obstacles. He would not look at them. If she would but take his hand, he would lead her and guard her, and all would go well. And it was to this effect that he wrote to her day after day, pouring out all the confidences

of his heart to her, appealing to her, striving to convey to her something of his own high courage and hope. Strictly speaking, perhaps, it was not quite fair that he should thus have disturbed the calm of her deliberation. Had he not given her till the end of the week to come to a decision? But when, in his eagerness, he thought of some further reason, some further appeal, how could he remain silent? With the prize so near, he could not let it slip from his grasp through the consideration of niceties of conduct. By rights he ought to have gone up to Mr. White and begged for permission to pay his addresses to the old gentleman's daughter. He forgot all about that. He forgot that Mr. White was in existence. All his thinking from morning till night—and through much of the night too—was directed on her answer—the one small word filled with a whole worldful of light and joy.

“If you will only say that one little word,” he wrote to her, “then everything else becomes a mere trifle. If there are obstacles, and troubles, and what not, we will meet them one by one, and dispose of them. There can be no obstacles, if we are of one mind; and we shall be of one mind sure enough, if you will say you will become my wife; for there is nothing I will not consent to; and I shall only be too glad to have opportunities of showing my great gratitude to you for the sacrifice you must make. I speak of it as a sacrifice; but I do not believe it is one—whatever you may think now—and whatever natural regret you may feel—you will grow to feel there was no evil done you when you were drawn away from the life that now surrounds you. And if you were to say ‘I will become your wife only on one condition—that I am not asked to abandon my career as an actress,’ still I would say ‘Become my wife.’ Surely matters of arrangement are mere trifles—after you have given me your promise. And when you have placed your hand in mine (and the motto of the Macleods is *Hold Fast*), we can study conditions, and obstacles, and the other nonsense that our friends are sure to suggest, at our leisure. I think I already hear you say ‘Yes;’ I listen and listen, until I almost hear your voice. And if it is to be ‘Yes,’ will you wear a red rose in your dress on Saturday? I shall see that before you speak. I will know what your message is, even if there are people about. One red rose only.”

“Macleod,” said Major Stuart to him, “did you come to London to write love-letters?”

"Love-letters!" he said, angrily; but then he laughed. "And what did you come to London for?"

"On a highly philanthropic errand," said the other, gravely, "which I hope to see fulfilled to-morrow. And if we have a day or two to spare, that is well enough, for one cannot be always at work; but I did not expect to take a holiday in the company of a man who spends three-fourths of the day at a writing-desk."

"Nonsense!" said Macleod, though there was some tell-tale color in his face. "All the writing I have done to-day would not fill up twenty minutes. And if I am a dull companion, is not Norman Ogilvie coming to dinner to-night to amuse you?"

While they were speaking, a servant brought in a card.

"Ask the gentleman to come up," Macleod said, and then he turned to his companion. "What an odd thing! I was speaking to you a minute ago about that drag accident. And here is Beauregard himself."

The tall, rough-visaged man—stooping slightly as though he thought the doorway was a trifle low—came forward and shook hands with Macleod, and was understood to inquire about his health, though what he literally said was, "Hawya, Macleod, hawya?"

"I heard you were in town from Paulton—you remember, Paulton, who dined with you at Richmond. He saw you in a hansom yesterday; and I took my chance of finding you in your old quarters. What are you doing in London?"

Macleod briefly explained.

"And you?" he asked, "what has brought you to London? I thought you and Lady Beauregard were in Ireland."

"We have just come over, and go down to Weatherill to-morrow. Won't you come down and shoot a pheasant or two before you return to the Highlands?"

"Well, the fact is," Macleod said, hesitatingly, "my friend and I—by the way, let me introduce you—Lord Beauregard, Major Stuart—the fact is, we ought to go back directly after we have settled this business."

"But a day or two won't matter. Now, let me see. Plymley comes to us on Monday next, I think. We could get up a party for you on the Tuesday; and if your friend will come with you, we shall be six guns, which I always think the best number."

The gallant major showed no hesitation whatever. The chance of blazing away at a whole atmosphereful of pheas-

ants—for so he construed the invitation—did not often come in his way.

“I am quite sure a day or two won’t make any difference,” said he, quickly. “In any case we were not thinking of going till Monday, and that would only mean an extra day.”

“Very well,” Macleod said.

“Then you will come down to dinner on the Monday evening. I will see if there is no alteration in the trains, and drop you a note with full instructions. Is it a bargain?”

“It is.”

“All right. I must be off now. Good-by.”

Major Stuart jumped to his feet with great alacrity, and warmly shook hands with the departing stranger. Then, when the door was shut, he went through a pantomimic expression of bringing down innumerable pheasants from every corner of the ceiling—with an occasional aim at the floor, where an imaginary hare was scurrying by.

“Macleod, Macleod,” said he, “you are a trump. You may go on writing love-letters from now till next Monday afternoon. I suppose we will have a good dinner, too?”

“Beauregard is said to have the best *chef* in London; and I don’t suppose they would leave so important a person in Ireland.”

“You have my gratitude, Macleod—eternal, sincere, unbounded,” the major said, seriously.

“But it is not I who am asking you to go and massacre a lot of pheasants,” said Macleod; and he spoke rather absently, for he was thinking of the probable mood in which he would go down to Weatherill. One of a generous gladness and joy, the outward expression of an eager and secret happiness to be known by none? Or what if there were no red rose at all on her bosom when she advanced to meet him with sad eyes?

They went down into Essex next day. Major Stuart was surprised to find that his companion talked not so much about the price of machines for drying saturated crops as about the conjectural cost of living in the various houses they saw from afar, set amidst the leafless trees of November.

“You don’t think of coming to live in England, do you?” said he.

“No—at least, not at present,” Macleod said. “Of course, one never knows what may turn up. I don’t propose to live at Dare all my life.”

"Your wife might want to live in England," the major said, coolly.

Macleod started and stared.

"You have been writing a good many letters of late," said his companion.

"And is that all?" said Macleod, answering him in the Gaelic. "You know the proverb—*Tossing the head will not make the boat row*. I am not married yet."

The result of this journey was, that they agreed to purchase one of the machines for transference to the rainy regions of Mull; and then they returned to London. This was on Wednesday. Major Stuart considered they had a few days to idle by before the *battue*; Macleod was only excitedly aware that Thursday and Friday—two short November days—came between him and that decision which he regarded with an anxious joy.

The day went by in a sort of dream. A pale fog hung over London; and as he wandered about he saw the tall houses rise faintly blue into the gray mist; and the great coffee-colored river, flushed with recent rains, rolled down between the pale embankments; and the golden-red globe of the sun, occasionally becoming visible through the mottled clouds, sent a ray of fire here and there on some window-pane or lamp.

In the course of his devious wanderings—for he mostly went about alone—he made his way, with great trouble and perplexity, to the court in which the mother of Johnny Wickes lived; and he betrayed no shame at all in confronting the poor woman—half starved, and pale, and emaciated as she was—whose child he had stolen. It was in a tone of quite gratuitous pleasantry that he described to her how the small lad was growing brown and fat; and he had the audacity to declare to her that as he proposed to pay the boy the sum of one shilling per week at present, he might as well hand over to her the three months' pay which he had already earned. And the woman was so amused at the notion of little Johnny Wickes being able to earn anything at all, that, when she received the money and looked at it, she burst out crying; and she had so little of the spirit of the British matron, and so little regard for the laws of her country, that she invoked Heaven knows what—Heaven does know what—blessings on the head of the very man who had carried her child into slavery.

"And the first time I am going over to Oban," said he,

‘I will take him with me, and I will get a photograph of him made, and I will send you the photograph. And did you get the rabbits?’ said he.

“Yes, indeed, sir, I got the rabbits.”

“And it is a very fine poacher your son promises to be, for he got every one of the rabbits with his own snare, though I am thinking it was old Hamish was showing him how to use it. And I will say good-by to you now.”

The poor woman seemed to hesitate for a second.

“If there was any sewing, sir,” wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, “that I could do for your good lady, sir—”

“But I am not married,” said he, quickly.

“Ah, well, indeed, sir,” she said with a sigh.

“But if there is any lace, or sewing, or anything like that you can send to my mother, I have no doubt she will pay you for it as well as any one else—”

“I was not thinking of paying, sir; but to show you I am not ungrateful,” was the answer; and if she said *ungrateful*, what matter? She was a woman without spirit; she had sold away her son.

From this dingy court he made his way round to Covent Garden market, and he went into a florist’s shop there.

“I want a bouquet,” said he to the neat-handed maiden who looked up at him.

“Yes, sir,” said she; “will you look at those in the window?”

“But I want one,” said he, “with a single rose—a red rose—in the centre.”

This proposition did not find favor in the eyes of the mild-mannered artist, who explained to him that something more important and ornate was necessary in the middle of a bouquet. He could have a circle of rose-buds, if he liked, outside; and a great white lily or camellia in the centre. He could have—this thing and the next; she showed him how she could combine the features of this bouquet with those of the next. But the tall Highlander remained obdurate.

“Yes,” said he, “I think you are quite right. You are quite right, I am sure. But it is this that I would rather have—only one red rose in the centre, and you can make the rest what you like, only I think if they were smaller flowers, and all white, that would be better.”

“Very well,” said the young lady, with a pleasing smile (she was rather good-looking herself), “I will try what I can

do for you if you don't mind waiting. Will you take a chair?"

He was quite amazed by the dexterity with which those nimble fingers took from one cluster and another cluster the very flowers he would himself have chosen; and by the rapid fashion in which they were dressed, fitted, and arranged. The work of art grew apace.

"But you must have something to break the white," said she, smiling, "or it will look too like a bride's bouquet;" and with that—almost in the twinkling of an eye—she had put a circular line of dark purple-blue through the cream-white blossoms. It was a splendid rose that lay in the midst of all that beauty.

"What price would you like to give, sir?" the gentle Phyllis had said at the very outset. "Half a guinea—fifteen shillings?"

"Give me a beautiful rose," said he, "and I do not mind what the price is."

And at last the lace-paper was put round; and a little further trimming and setting took place; and finally the bouquet was swathed in soft white wool and put into a basket.

"Shall I take the address?" said the young lady no doubt expecting that he would write it on the back of one of his cards. But no. He dictated the address, and then lay down the money. The astute young person was puzzled—perhaps disappointed.

"Is there no message, sir?" said she—"no card?"

"No; but you must be sure to have it delivered to-night."

"It shall be sent off at once," said she, probably thinking that this was a very foolish young man who did not know the ways of the world. The only persons of whom she had any experience who sent bouquets without a note or a letter were husbands, who were either making up a quarrel with their wives or going to the opera, and she had observed that on such occasions the difference between twelve-and-sixpence and fifteen shillings was regarded and considered.

He slept but little that night; and next morning he got up nervous and trembling, like a drunken man, with half the courage and confidence, that had so long sustained him, gone. Major Stuart went out early. He kept pacing about the room until the frightfully slow half-hours went by; he hated the clock on the mantelpiece. And then, by a strong effort of will, he delayed starting until he should barely have time to reach her house by twelve o'clock, so that he should

have the mad delight of eagerly wishing the hansom had a still more furious speed. He had chosen his horse well. It wanted five minutes to the appointed hour when he arrived at the house.

Did this trim maid-servant know? Was there anything of welcome in the demure smile? He followed her; his face was pale, though he knew it not; in the dusk of the room he was left alone.

But what was this on the table? He almost uttered a cry as his bewildered eyes fixed themselves on it. The very bouquet he had sent the previous evening; and behold—behold!—the red rose wanting! And then, at the same moment, he turned; and there was a vision of something all in white—that came to him timidly—all in white but for the red star of love shining there. And she did not speak at all; but she buried her head in his bosom; and he held her hands tight.

And now what will Ulva say—and the lonely shores of Fladda—and the distant Dutchman roused from his winter sleep amidst the wild waves? Far away over the white sands of Iona—and the sunlight must be shining there now—there is many a sacred spot fit for the solemn plighting of lovers' vows; and if there is any organ wanted, what more noble than the vast Atlantic rollers booming into the Bourg and Gribun caves? Surely they must know already; for the sea-birds have caught the cry; and there is a sound all through the glad rushing of the morning seas like the sound of wedding-bells. *There is a bride coming to Castle Dare*—the islands listen; and the wild sea calls again; and the green shores of Ulva grow greener still in the sunlight. There is a bride coming to Castle Dare; and the bride is dressed all in white—only she wears a red rose.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ENTHUSIASMS

SHE was seated alone, her arms on the table, her head bent down. There was no red rose now in the white morning-dress, for she had given it to him when he left. The

frail November sunshine streamed into the room and put a shimmer of gold on the soft brown of her hair.

It was a bold step she had taken, without counsel of any one. Her dream was now to give up everything that she had hitherto cared about, and to go away into private life to play the part of Lady Bountiful. And if doubts about the strength of her own resolution occasionally crossed her mind, could she not appeal for aid and courage to him who would always be by her side? When she became a Macleod, she would have to accept the motto of the Macleods. That motto is, *Hold Fast*.

She heard her sister come into the house, and she raised her head. Presently Carry opened the door; and it was clear she was in high spirits.

"Oh, Mopsy," said she—and this was a pet name she gave her sister only when the latter was in great favor—"did you ever see such a morning in November? Don't you think papa might take us to Kew Gardens?"

"I want to speak to you, Carry—come here," she said, gravely; and the younger sister went and stood by the table. "You know you and I are thrown very much on each other; and we ought to have no secrets from each other; and we ought to be always quite sure of each other's sympathy. Now, Carry, you must be patient, you must be kind: if I don't get sympathy from you, from whom should I get it?"

Carry withdrew a step, and her manner instantly changed. Gertrude White was a very clever actress; but she had never been able to impose on her younger sister. This imploring look was all very fine; this appeal for sympathy was pathetic enough; but both only awakened Carry's suspicions. In their ordinary talk sisters rarely use such formal words as "sympathy."

"What do you mean?" said she, sharply.

"There—already!" exclaimed the other, apparently in deep disappointment. "Just when I most need your kindness and sympathy, you show yourself most unfeeling—"

"I wish you would tell me what it is all about," Carry said, impatiently.

The elder sister lowered her eyes, and her fingers began to work with a paper-knife that was lying there. Perhaps this was only a bit of stage-business; or perhaps she was really a little apprehensive about the effect of her announcement.

"Carry," she said, in a low voice, "I have promised to marry Sir Keith Macleod.

Carry uttered a slight cry of horror and surprise; but this too was only a bit of stage effect, for she had fully anticipated the disclosure.

"Well, Gertrude White!" said she, apparently when she had recovered her breath. "Well—I—I—I—never!"

Her language was not as imposing as her gestures; but then nobody had written the part for her; whereas her very tolerable acting was nature's own gift.

"Now, Carry, be reasonable—don't be angry: what is the use of being vexed with what is past recalling? Any other sister would be very glad at such a time—" These were the hurried and broken sentences with which the culprit sought to stave off the coming wrath. But, oddly enough, Miss Carry refrained from denunciations or any other stormy expression of her anger and scorn. She suddenly assumed a cold and critical air.

"I suppose," said she, "before you allowed Sir Keith Macleod to ask you to become his wife, you explained to him our circumstances."

"I don't understand you."

"You told him, of course, that you had a ne'er-do-well brother in Australia, who might at any moment appear and disgrace the whole family?"

"I told him nothing of the kind. I had no opportunity of getting into family affairs. And if I had, what has Tom got to do with Sir Keith Macleod? I had forgotten his very existence—no wonder, after eight years of absolute silence."

But Carry, having fired this shot, was off after other ammunition.

"You told him you had sweethearts before?"

"No, I did not," said Miss Gertrude White, warmly, "because it isn't true."

"What?—Mr. Howson?"

"The orchestra leader in a provincial theatre!"

"Oh yes! but you did not speak so contemptuously of him then. Why, you made him believe he was another Mendelssohn!"

"You are talking nonsense."

"And Mr. Brook—you no doubt told him that Mr. Brook called on papa, and asked him to go down to Doctors' Commons and see for himself what money he would have——"

"And what then? How can I prevent any idiotic boy who

chooses to turn me into a heroine from going and making a fool of himself ? ”

“ Oh, Gertrude White ! ” said Carry, solemnly. “ Will you sit there and tell me you gave him no encouragement ? ”

“ This is mere folly ! ” the elder sister said, petulantly; as she rose and proceeded to put straight a few of the things about the room. “ I had hoped better things of you, Carry. I tell you of an important step I have taken in my life, and you bring out a lot of tattle and nonsense. However, I can act for myself. It is true, I had imagined something different. When I marry, of course, we shall be separated. I had looked forward to the pleasure of showing you my new home.”

“ Where is it to be ? ”

“ Wherever my husband wishes it to be,” she answered, proudly; but there was a conscious flush of color in her face as she uttered—for the first time—that word.

“ In the Highlands, I suppose, for he is not rich enough to have two houses,” said Carry; which showed that she had been pondering over this matter before. “ And he has already got his mother and his old-maid sister, or whatever she is, in the house. You will make a pretty family ! ”

This was a cruel thrust. When Macleod had spoken of the far home overlooking the Northern seas, what could be more beautiful than his picture of the noble and silver-haired dame, and of the gentle and loving cousin who was the friend and counsellor of the poor people around? And when he had suggested that some day or other Mr. White might bring his daughter to these remote regions to see all the wonders and the splendors of them, he told her how the beautiful mother would take her to this place and to that place, and how that Janet Macleod would pet and befriend her, and perhaps teach her a few words of the Gaelic, that she might have a kindly phrase for the passer-by. But this picture of Carry’s!—a houseful of wrangling women!

If she had had her will just then, she would instantly have recalled Macleod, and placed his courage and careless confidence between her and this cruel criticism. She had never, in truth, thought of these things. His pertinacity would not allow her. He had kept insisting that the only point for her to consider was whether she had sufficient love for him to enable her to answer his great love for her with the one word “ Yes.” Thereafter, according to his showing, everything else was a mere trifle. Obstacles, troubles, de-

lays?—he would hear of nothing of the sort. And although, while he was present, she had been inspired by something of this confident feeling, now when she was attacked in his absence she felt herself defenceless.

“You may be as disagreeable as you like, Carry,” said she, almost wearily. “I cannot help it. I never could understand our dislike to Sir Keith Macleod.”

“Cannot you understand,” said the younger sister, with some show of indignation, “that if you are to marry at all, I should like to see you marry an Englishman, instead of a great Highland savage who thinks about nothing but beasts’ skins. And why should you marry at all, Gertrude White? I suppose he will make you leave the theatre; and instead of being a famous woman whom everybody admires and talks about, you will be plain Mrs. Nobody, hidden away in some place, and no one will ever hear of you again! Do you know what you are doing? Did you ever hear of any woman making such a fool of herself before?”

So far from being annoyed by this strong language, the elder sister seemed quite pleased.

“Do you know, Carry, I like to hear you talk like that,” she said, with a smile. “You almost persuade me that I am not asking him for too great a sacrifice, after all—”

“A sacrifice! On his part!” exclaimed the younger sister; and then she added, with decision: “but it shan’t be, Gertrude White! I will go to papa.”

“Pardon me,” said the elder sister, who was nearer the door, “you need not trouble yourself: I am going now.”

She went into the small room which was called her father’s study, but which was in reality a sort of museum. She closed the door behind her.

“I have just had the pleasure of an interview with Carry, papa,” she said, with a certain bitterness of tone, “and she has tried hard to make me as miserable as I can be. If I am to have another dose of it from you, papa, I may as well have it at once. I have promised to marry Sir Keith Macleod.”

She sank down in an easy-chair. There was a look on her face which plainly said, “Now do your worst; I cannot be more wretched than I am.”

“You have promised to marry Sir Keith Macleod?” he repeated, slowly, and fixing his eyes on her face.

He did not break into any rage, and accuse Macleod of treachery or her of filial disobedience. He knew that she

was familiar with that kind of thing. What he had to deal with was the immediate future, not the past.

"Yes," she answered.

"Well," he said, with the same deliberation of tone, "I suppose you have not come to me for advice, since you have acted so far for yourself. If I were to give you advice, however, it would be to break your promise as soon as you decently can, both for his sake and for your own."

"I thought you would say so," she said, with a sort of desperate mirth. "I came to have all my wretchedness heaped on me at once. It is a very pleasing sensation. I wonder if I could express it on the stage. That would be making use of my new experiences—as you have taught me——"

But here she burst into tears; and then got up and walked impatiently about the room; and finally dried her eyes, with shame and mortification visible on her face.

"What have *you* to say to me, papa? I am a fool to mind what a schoolgirl says."

"I don't know that I have anything to say," he observed, calmly. "You know your own feelings best."

And then he regarded her attentively.

"I suppose when you marry you will give up the stage."

"I suppose so," she said, in a low voice.

"I should doubt," he said, with quite a dispassionate air, "your being able to play one part for a lifetime. You might get tired—and that would be awkward for your husband and yourself. I don't say anything about your giving up all your prospects, although I had great pride in you and a still greater hope. That is for your own consideration. If you think you will be happier—if you are sure you will have no regret—if, as I say, you think you can play the one part for a lifetime—well and good."

"And you are right," she said, bitterly, "to speak of me as an actress, and not as a human being. I must be playing a part to the end, I suppose. Perhaps so. Well, I hope I shall please my smaller audience as well as I seem to have pleased the bigger one."

Then she altered her tone.

"I told you, papa, the other day of my having seen that child run over and brought back to the woman who was standing on the pavement."

"Yes," said he; but wondering why this incident should be referred to at such a moment.

"I did not tell you the truth—at least the whole truth. When I walked away, what was I thinking of? I caught myself trying to recall the way in which the woman threw her arms up when she saw the dead body of her child, and I was wondering whether I could repeat it. And then I began to wonder whether I was a devil—or a woman."

"Bah!" said he. "That is a craze you have at present. You have had fifty others before. What I am afraid of is that, at the instigation of some such temporary fad, you will take a step that you will find irrevocable. Just think it over, Gerty. If you leave the stage, you will destroy many a hope I had formed; but that doesn't matter. Whatever is most for your happiness—that is the only point."

"And so you have given me your congratulations, papa," she said, rising. "I have been so thoroughly trained to be an actress that, when I marry, I shall only go from one stage to another."

"That was only a figure of speech," said he.

"At all events," she said, "I shall not be vexed by petty jealousies of other actresses, and I shall cease to be worried and humiliated by what they say about me in the provincial newspapers."

"As for the newspapers," he retorted, "you have little to complain of. They have treated *you* very well. And even if they annoyed you by a phrase here or there, surely the remedy is simple. You need not read them. You don't require any recommendation to the public now. As for your jealousy of other actresses—that was always an unreasonable vexation on your part——"

"Yes, and that only made it the more humiliating to myself," said she, quickly.

"But think of this," said he. "You are married. You have been long away from the scene of your former triumphs. Some day you go to the theatre; and you find as the favorite of the public a woman who, you can see, cannot come near to what you used to do. And I suppose you won't be jealous of her, and anxious to defeat her on the old ground."

"I can do with that as you suggested about the newspapers: I need not go to the theatre."

"Very well, Gerty. I hope all will be for the best. But do not be in a hurry; take time and consider."

She saw clearly enough that this calm acquiescence was

all the congratulation or advice she was likely to get ; and she went to the door.

"Papa," said she, diffidently, "Sir Keith Macleod is coming up to-morrow morning—to go to church with us."

"Yes?" said he, indifferently.

"He may speak to you before we go."

"Very well. Of course I have nothing to say in the matter. You are mistress of your own actions."

She went to her own room, and locked herself in, feeling very lonely, and disheartened, and miserable. There was more to alarm her in her father's faintly expressed doubts than in all Carry's vehement opposition and taunts. Why had Macleod left her alone?—if only she could see him laugh, her courage would be reassured.

Then she bethought her that this was not a fit mood for one who had promised to be the wife of a Macleod. She went to the mirror and regarded herself ; and almost unconsciously an expression of pride and resolve appeared about the lines of her mouth. And she would show to herself that she had still a woman's feelings by going out and doing some actual work of charity ; she would prove to herself that the constant simulation of noble emotions had not deadened them in her own nature. She put on her hat and shawl, and went downstairs, and went out into the free air and the sunlight—without a word to either Carry or her father. She was trying to imagine herself as having already left the stage and all its fictitious allurements. She was now Lady Bountiful : having looked after the simple cares of her household she was now ready to cast her eyes abroad, and relieve in so far as she might the distress around her. The first object of charity she encountered was an old crossing-sweeper. She addressed him in a matter-of-fact way which was intended to conceal her fluttering self-consciousness. She inquired whether he had a wife ; whether he had any children ; whether they were not rather poor. And having been answered in the affirmative on all these points, she surprised the old man by giving him five shillings and telling him to go home and get a good warm dinner for his family. She passed on, and did not observe that, as soon as her back was turned, the old wretch made straight for the nearest public-house.

But her heart was happy ; and her courage rose. It was not for nothing, then, that she had entertained the bold resolve of casting aside forever the one great ambition of her life—with all its intoxicating successes, and hopes, and strug-

gles—for the homely and simple duties of an ordinary woman's existence. It was not in vain that she had read and dreamed of the far romantic land, and had ventured to think of herself as the proud wife of Macleod of Dare. Those fierce deeds of valor and vengeance that had terrified and thrilled her would now become part of her own inheritance ; why, she could tell her friends, when they came to see her, of all the old legends and fairy stories that belonged to her own home. And the part of Lady Bountiful—surely, if she must play some part that was the one she would most dearly like to play. And the years would go by ; and she would grow silver-haired too ; and when she lay on her death-bed she would take her husband's hand and say, " Have I lived the life you wished me to live ? " Her cheerfulness grew apace ; and the walking, and the sunshine, and the fresh air brought a fine light and color to her eyes and cheeks. There was a song singing through her head ; and it was all about the brave Glenogie whe rode up the king's ha'.

But as she turned the corner of a street, her eye rested on a huge colored placard—rested but for a moment, for she would not look on the great, gaudy thing. Just at this time a noble lord had shown his interest in the British drama by spending an enormous amount of money in producing, at a theatre of his own building, a spectacular burlesque, the gorgeousness of which surpassed anything that had ever been done in that way. And the lady who appeared to be playing (in silence mostly) the chief part in this hash of glaring color and roaring music and clashing armor had gained a great celebrity by reason of her handsome figure, and the splendor of her costume, and the magnificence of the real diamonds that she wore. All London was talking of her ; and the vast theatre—even in November—was nightly crammed to overflowing. As Gertrude White walked back to her home her heart was filled with bitterness. She had caught sight of the ostentatious placard ; and she knew that the photograph of the creature who was figuring there was in every stationer's shop in the Strand. And that which galled her was not that the theatre should be so taken and so used, but that the stage heroine of the hour should be a woman who could act no more than any baboon in the Zoological Gardens.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN SUSSEX.

BUT as for him, there was no moderation at all in the vehemence of his joy. In the surprise and bewilderment of it, the world around him underwent transfiguration; London in November was glorified into an earthly paradise. The very people in the streets seemed to have kindly faces; Bury Street, St. James's—which is usually a somewhat misty thoroughfare—was more beautiful than the rose-garden of an Eastern king. And on this Saturday afternoon the blue skies did, indeed, continue to shine over the great city; and the air seemed sweet and clear enough, as it generally does to any one whose every heart-beat is only another throb of conscious gladness.

In this first intoxication of wonder, and pride, and gratitude, he had forgotten all about these ingenious theories which, in former days, he had constructed to prove to himself that Gertrude White should give up her present way of life. Was it true, then, that he had rescued the white slave? Was it once and forever that Nature, encountering the subtle demon of Art, had closed and wrestled with the insidious thing, had seized it by the throat, and choked it, and flung it aside from the fair roadway of life? He had forgotten about these things now. All that he was conscious of was this eager joy, with now and again a wild wonder that he should indeed have acquired so priceless a possession. Was it possible that she would really withdraw herself from the eyes of all the world and give herself to him alone?—that some day, in the beautiful and laughing future, the glory of her presence would light up the dull halls of Castle Dare?

Of course he poured all his pent-up confidence into the ear of the astonished major, and again and again expressed his gratitude to his companion for having given him the opportunity of securing this transcendent happiness. The major was somewhat frightened. He did not know in what measure he might be regarded as an accomplice by the silver-haired lady of Castle Dare. And in any case he was alarmed by the vehemence of the young man.

"My dear Macleod," said he, with an oracular air, "you never have any hold on yourself. You fling the reins on the horse's neck, and gallop down hill; a very slight check would send you whirling to the bottom. Now, you should take the advice of a man of the world, who is older than you, and who—if I may say so—has kept his eyes open. I don't want to discourage you; but you should take it for granted that accidents may happen. I would feel the reins a little bit, if I were you. Once you've got her into the church, and see her with a white veil over her head, then you may be as perfervid as you like——"

And so the simple-minded major prattled on, Macleod paying but little heed. There had been nothing about Major Stuart's courtship and marriage to shake the world: why, he said to himself, when the lady was pleased to lend a favoring ear, was there any reason for making such a fuss?

"Your happiness will all depend on one thing," said he to Macleod, with a complacent wisdom in the round and jovial face. "Take my word for it. I hear of people studying the character, the compatibilities, and what not, of other people; but I never knew of a young man thinking of such things when he was in love. He plunges in, and finds out afterward. Now it all comes this—is she likely, or not likely, to prove a sigher?"

"A what?" said Macleod, apparently awakening from a trance.

"A sigher. A woman who goes about the house all day sighing, whether over your sins or her own, she won't tell you."

"Indeed, I cannot say," Macleod said, laughing. "I should hope not. I think she has excellent spirits."

"Ah!" said the major, thoughtfully; and he himself sighed. Perhaps he was thinking of a certain house far away in Mull, to which he had shortly to return.

Macleod did not know how to show his gratitude toward this good-natured friend. He would have given him half a dozen banquets a day; and Major Stuart liked a London dinner. But what he did offer as a great reward was this: that Major Stuart should go up the next morning to a particular church, and take up a particular position in that church, and then—then he would get a glimpse of the most wonderful creature the world had seen. Oddly enough, the major did not eagerly accept this munificent offer. To another proposal—that he should go up to Mr. White's, on the

first day after their return from Sussex, and meet the young lady at luncheon—he seemed better inclined.

“But why shouldn’t we go to the theatre to-night?” said he, in his simple way.

Macleod looked embarrassed.

“Frankly, then, Stuart,” said he, “I don’t want you to make her acquaintance as an actress.”

“Oh, very well,” said he, not greatly disappointed. “Perhaps it is better. You see, I may be questioned at Castle Dare. Have you considered that matter?”

“Oh no,” Macleod said, lightly and cheerfully, “I have had time to consider nothing as yet. I can scarcely believe it to be all real. It takes a deal of hard thinking to convince myself that I am not dreaming.”

But the true fashion in which Macleod showed his gratitude to his friend was in concealing his great reluctance on going down with him into Sussex. It was like rending his heart-strings for him to leave London for a single hour at this time. What beautiful confidences, and tender, timid looks, and sweet, small words he was leaving behind him in order to go and shoot a lot of miserable pheasants! He was rather gloomy when he met the major at Victoria Station. They got into the train; and away through the darkness of the November afternoon they rattled to Three Bridges; but all the eager sportsman had gone out of him, and he had next to nothing to say in answer to the major’s excited questions. Occasionally he would rouse himself from this reverie, and he would talk in a perfunctory sort of fashion about the immediate business of a moment. He confessed that he had a certain theoretical repugnance to a *battue*, if it were at all like what people in the newspapers declared it to be. On the other hand, he could not well understand—judging by his experiences in the highlands—how the shooting of driven birds could be so marvellously easy; and he was not quite sure that the writers he had referred to had had many opportunities of practising, or even observing, so very expensive an amusement. Major Stuart, for his part, freely admitted that he had no scruples whatever. Shooting birds, he roundly declared, was shooting birds, whether you shot two or two score. And he demurely hinted that, if he had his choice, he would rather shoot the two score.

“Mind you, Stuart,” Macleod said, “if we are posted anywhere near each other—mind you shoot at any bird that comes my way. I should like you to make a big bag that

you may talk about in Mull ; and I really don't care about it."

And this was the man whom Miss Carry had described as being nothing but a slayer of wild animals and a preserver of beasts' skins ! Perhaps, in that imaginary duel between Nature and Art, the enemy was not so thoroughly beaten and thrown aside, after all.

So they got to Three Bridges, and there they found the carriage awaiting them ; and presently they were whirling away along the dark roads, with the lamps shining alternately on a line of hedge or on a long stretch of ivied brick wall. And at last they passed a lodge gate, and drove through a great and silent park ; and finally, rattling over the gravel, drew up in front of some gray steps and a blaze of light coming from the wide-open doors. Under Lord Beauregard's guidance, they went into the drawing-room, and found a number of people idly chatting there, or reading by the subdued light of the various lamps on the small tables. There was a good deal of talk about the weather. Macleod, vaguely conscious that these people were only strangers, and that the one heart that was thinking of him was now far away, paid but little heed ; if he had been told that the barometer predicted fifteen thunder-storms for the morrow, he would have been neither startled nor dismayed.

But he managed to say to his host, aside :—

"Beauregard, look here. I suppose, in this sort of shooting, you have some little understanding with your head-keeper about the posts—who is to be a bit favored, you know. Well, I wish you would ask him to look after my friend Stuart. He can leave me out altogether, if he likes."

"My dear fellow, there will be scarcely any difference ; but I will look after your friend myself. I suppose you have no guns with you ?"

"I have borrowed Ogilvie's. Stuart has none."

"I will get one for him."

By and by they went upstairs to their respective rooms, and Macleod was left alone, that is to say, he was scarcely aware of the presence of the man who was opening his portmanteau and putting out his things. He lay back in the low easy-chair, and stared absently into the blazing fire. This was a beautiful but a lonely house. There were many strangers in it. But if she had been one of the people below—if he could at this moment look forward to meeting her at dinner—if there was a chance of his sitting beside her and lis-

tening to the low and sweet voice—with what an eager joy he would have waited for the sound of the bell! As it was, his heart was in London. He had no sort of interest in this big house, or in the strangers whom he had met, or in the proceedings of the morrow, about which all the men were talking. It was a lonely house.

He was aroused by a tapping at the door.

"Come in," he said, and Major Stuart entered, blooming and roseate over his display of white linen.

"Good gracious!" said he, "aren't you dressed yet? It wants but ten minutes to dinner-time. What have you been doing?"

Macleod jumped up with some shamefacedness, and began to array himself quickly.

"Macleod," said the major, subsiding into the big arm-chair very carefully so as not to crease his shining shirt-front, "I must give you another piece of advice. It is serious. I have heard again and again that when a man thinks only of one thing—when he keeps brooding over it day and night—he is bound to become mad. They call it monomania. You are becoming a monomaniac."

"Yes, I think I am," Macleod said, laughing; "but it is a very pleasant sort of monomania, and I am not anxious to become sane. But you really must not be hard on me, Stuart. You know that this is rather an important thing that has happened to me; and it wants a good deal of thinking over."

"Bah!" the major cried, "why take it so much *au grand sérieux*? A girl likes you; says she'll marry you; probably, if she continues in the same mind, she will. Consider yourself a lucky dog; and don't break your heart if an accident occurs. Hope for the best—that you and she mayn't quarrel, and that she mayn't prove a sigher. Now what do you think of this house? I consider it an uncommon good dodge to put each person's name outside his bedroom door; there can't be any confounded mistakes—and women squealing—if you come up late at night. Why, Macleod, you don't mean that this affair has destroyed all your interest in the shooting? Man, I have been down to the gun-room with your friend Beauregard; have seen the head-keeper; got a gun that suits me first-rate—a trifle long in the stock, perhaps, but no matter. You won't tip any more than the head-keeper, eh? And the fellow who carries your cartridge-bag? I do think it uncommonly civil of a man not only to ask you to go

shooting, but to find you in guns and cartridges; don't you?"

The major chatted on with great cheerfulness. He clearly considered that he had got into excellent quarters. At dinner he told some of his most famous Indian stories to Lady Beauregard, near whom he was sitting; and at night, in the improvised smoking-room, he was great on deer-stalking. It was not necessary for Macleod, or anybody else, to talk. The major was in full flow, though he stoutly refused to touch the spirits on the table. He wanted a clear head and a steady hand for the morning.

Alas! alas! The next morning presented a woful spectacle. Gray skies; heavy and rapidly drifting clouds; pouring rain; runnels of clear water by the side of every gravel-path; a rook or two battling with the squally south-wester high over the wide and desolate park: the wild-ducks at the margin of the ruffled lake flapping their wings as if the wet was too much even for them; nearer at hand the firs and evergreens all dripping. After breakfast the male guests wandered disconsolately into the cold billiard-room, and began knocking the balls about. All the loquacious cheerfulness of the major had fled. He looked out on the wet park and the sombre woods, and sighed.

But about twelve o'clock there was a great hurry and confusion throughout the house; for all of a sudden the skies in the west cleared; there was a glimmer of blue; and then gleams of a pale wan light began to stream over the landscape. There was a rush to the gun-room, and an eager putting on of shooting-boots and leggings; there was a rapid tying up of small packages of sandwiches; presently the wagonette was at the door. And then away they went over the hard gravel, and out into the wet roads, with the sunlight now beginning to light up the beautiful woods about Crawley. The horses seemed to know there was no time to lose. A new spirit took possession of the party. The major's face glowed as red as the hip that here and there among the almost leafless hedges shone in the sunlight on the ragged brier stem.

And yet it was about one o'clock before the work of the day began, for the beaters had to be summoned from various parts, and the small boys with the white flags—the "stops"—had to be posted so as to check runners. And then the six guns went down over a ploughed field—half clay and half chalk, and ankle deep—to the margin of a rapidly run-

ning and coffee-colored stream, which three of them had to cross by means of a very shaky plank. Lord Beauregard, Major Stuart, and Macleod remained on this side, keeping a look-out for a straggler, but chiefly concerned with the gradually opening and brightening sky. Then far away they heard a slight tapping on the trees; and almost at the same moment another sound caused the hearts of the two novices to jump. It was a quick *cuck-cuck*, accompanied by a rapid and silken winnowing of the air. Then an object, which seemed like a cannon-ball with a long tail attached, came whizzing along. Major Stuart fired—a bad miss. Then he wheeled round, took good aim, and down came a mass of feathers, whirling, until it fell motionless on the ground.

“Well hit!” Macleod cried; but at the same moment he became conscious that he had better mind his own business, for there was another whirring sound, and then he saw this rapidly enlarging object coming straight at him. He fired, and shot the bird dead; but so rapid was its flight that he had to duck his head as the slain bird drove past his face and tumbled on to the ground behind him.

“This is rather like firing at bomb-shells,” he called out to Lord Beauregard.

It was certainly a new experience for Macleod to figure as a novice in any matter connected with shooting; but both the major and he speedily showed that they were not unfamiliar with the use of a gun. Whether the birds came at them like bomb-shells, or sprung like a sky-rocket through the leafless branches, they met with the same polite attention; though occasionally one would double back on the beaters and get clear away, sailing far into the silver-clear sky. Lord Beauregard scarcely shot at all, unless he was fairly challenged by a bird flying right past him: he seemed quite content to see his friends having plenty of work; while, in the interest of the beaters, he kept calling out, in a high monotone, “Shoot high! shoot high!” Then there was some motion among the brushwood; here and there a man or boy appeared; and finally the under-keeper with his retriever came across the stream to pick up the dead birds. That bit was done with: *vorwärts!*

“Well, Stuart,” Macleod said, “what do you think of it? I don’t see anything murderous or unsportsmanlike in this kind of shooting. Of course shooting with dogs is much prettier; and you don’t get any exercise standing in a wet

field; but the man who says that shooting those birds requires no skill at all—well, I should like see him try.”

“Macleod,” said the major, gravely, as they plodded along, “you may think that I despise this kind of thing; but I don’t: I give you my solemn word of honor that I don’t. I will even go the length of saying that if Providence had blessed me with £20,000 a year, I should be quite content to own a bit of country like this. I played the part of the wild mountaineer last night, you know; that was all very well—”

Here there was a loud call from Lord Beauregard, who had overtaken them—“*Hare! hare! Mark hare?*” The major jumped round, put up his gun, and banged away—shooting far ahead in his eagerness. Macleod looked on, and did not even raise his gun.

“That comes of talking,” the major said, gloomily. “And you—why didn’t you shoot? I never saw you miss a hare in my life.”

“I was not thinking of it,” Macleod said, indifferently.

It was very soon apparent that he was thinking of something other than the shooting of pheasants or hares; for as they went from one wood to another during this beautiful brief November day he generally carried his gun over his shoulder—even when the whirring, bright-plumaged birds were starting from time to time from the hedgerows—and devoted most of his attention to warning his friend when and where to shoot. However, an incident occurred which entirely changed the aspect of affairs. At one beat he was left quite alone, posted in an open space of low brushwood close by the corner of a wood. He rested the butt of his gun on his foot; he was thinking, not of any pheasant or hare, but of the beautiful picture Gertrude White would make if she were coming down one of these open glades, between the green stems of the trees, with the sunlight around her and the fair sky overhead. Idly he watched the slowly drifting clouds; they were going away northward—by and by they would sail over London. The rifts of blue widened in the clear silver; surely the sunlight would now be shining over Regent’s Park. Occasionally a pheasant came clattering along; he only regarded the shining colors of its head and neck brilliant in the sunlight. A rabbit trotted by him; he let it go. But while he was standing thus, and vaguely listening to the rattle of guns on the other side, he was suddenly startled by a quick cry of pain; and he thought he heard some one call, “Macleod! Macleod!” Instantly he

put his gun against a bush, and ran. He found a hedge at the end of the wood; he drove through it, and got into the open field. There was the unlucky major, with blood running down his face, a handkerchief in his hand, and two men beside him, one of them offering him some brandy from a flask. However, after the first fright was over, it was seen that Major Stuart was but slightly hurt. The youngest member of the party had fired at a bird coming out of the wood; had missed it; had tried to wheel round to send the second barrel after it; but his feet, having sunk into the wet clay, had caught there, and, in his stumbling fall, somehow or other the second barrel went off, one pellet just catching the major under the eye. The surface wound caused a good shedding of blood, but that was all; and when the major had got his face washed he shouldered his gun again, and with indomitable pluck said he would see the thing out. It was nothing but a scratch, he declared. It might have been dangerous; but what was the good of considering what might have been? To the young man who had been the cause of the accident, and who was quite unable to express his profound sorrow and shame, he was generously considerate, saying that he had fined him in the sum of one penny when he took a postage-stamp to cover the wound.

"Lord Beauregard," said he, cheerfully, "I want you to show me a thorough-going hot corner. You know I am an ignoramus of this kind of thing."

"Well," said his host, "there is a good bit along here, if you would rather go on."

"Go on?" said he. "Of course!"

And it was a "hot corner." They came to it at the end of a long double hedgerow connected with the wood they had just beaten; and as there was no "stop" at the corner of the wood, the pheasants in large numbers had run into the channel between the double line of hedge. Here they were followed by the keepers and beaters, who kept gently driving them along. Occasionally one got up, and was instantly knocked over by one of the guns; but it was evident that the "hot corner" would be at the end of this hedgerow, where there was stationed a smock-frocked rustic who, down on his knees, was gently tapping with a bit of stick. The number of birds getting up increased, so that the six guns had pretty sharp work to reckon with them; and not a few of the wildly whirring objects got clean away into the next wood—Lord Beauregard all the time calling out from the

other side of the hedge, "Shoot high ! shoot high !" But at the end of the hedgerow an extraordinary scene occurred. One after the other, then in twos and threes, the birds sprang high over the bushes ; the rattle of musketry—all the guns being together now—was deafening ; the air was filled with gunpowder smoke ; and every second or two another bird came tumbling down on to the young corn. Macleod, with a sort of derisive laugh, put his gun over his shoulder.

"This is downright stupidity," he said to Major Stuart, who was blazing away as hard as ever he could cram cartridges into the hot barrels of his gun. "You can't tell whether you are hitting the bird or not. There ! Three men fired at that bird—the other two were not touched."

The fusillade lasted for about eight or ten minutes ; and then it was discovered that though certainly two or three hundred pheasants had got up at this corner, only twenty-two and a half brace were killed—to five guns.

"Well," said the major, taking off his cap and wiping his forehead, "that was a bit of a scrimmage !"

"Perhaps," said Macleod, who had been watching with some amusement his friend's fierce zeal ; "but it was not shooting. I defy you to say how many birds you shot. Or I will do this with you—I will bet you a sovereign that if you ask each man to tell you how many birds he has shot during the day, and add them all up, the total will be twice the number of birds the keepers will take home. But I am glad you seem to enjoy it, Stuart."

"To tell you the truth, Macleod," said the other, "I think I have had enough of it. I don't want to make a fuss ; but I fancy I don't quite see clearly with this eye. It may be some slight inflammation ; but I think I will go back to the house, and see if there's any surgeon in the neighborhood."

"There you are right ; and I will go back with you," Macleod said, promptly.

When their host heard of this, he was for breaking up the party ; but Major Stuart warmly remonstrated ; and so one of the men was sent with the two friends to show them the way back to the house. When the surgeon came he examined the wound, and pronounced it to be slight enough in itself, but possibly dangerous when so near so sensitive an organ as the eye. He advised the major, if any symptoms of inflammation declared themselves, to go at once to a skillful oculist in London, and not to leave for the North until he was quite assured.

"That sounds rather well, Macleod," said he, ruefully.

"Oh, if you must remain in London—though I hope not—I will stay with you," Macleod said. It was a great sacrifice, his remaining in London, instead of going at once back to Castle Dare; but what will not one do for one's friend?

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN INTERVIEW.

ON the eventful morning on which Major Stuart was to be presented to the chosen bride of Macleod of Dare, the simple-hearted soldier—notwithstanding that he had a shade over one eye, made himself exceedingly smart. He would show the young lady that Macleod's friends in the North were not barbarians. The major sent back his boots to be brushed a second time. A more smoothly fitting pair of gloves Bond Street never saw.

"But you have not the air," said he to Macleod, "of a young fellow going to see his sweetheart. What is the matter, man?"

Macleod hesitated for a moment.

"Well, I am anxious she should impress you favorably," said he, frankly; "and it is an awkward position for her—and she will be embarrassed, no doubt—and I have some pity for her, and almost wish some other way had been taken——"

"Oh, nonsense?" the major said, cheerfully. "You need not be nervous on her account. Why, man, the silliest girl in the world could impose on an old fool like me. Once upon a time, perhaps, I may have considered myself a connoisseur—well, you know, Macleod, I once had a waist like the rest of you; but now, bless you, if a tolerably pretty girl only says a civil word or two to me, I begin to regard her as if I were her guardian angel—in *loco parentis*, and that kind of thing—and I would sooner hang myself than scan her dress or say a word about her figure. Do you think she will be afraid of a critic with one eye? Have courage, man. I dare bet a sovereign she is quite capable of taking care of herself. It's her business."

Macleod flushed quickly, and the one eye of the major caught that sudden confession of shame or resentment.

"What I meant was," he said, instantly, "that nature had taught the simplest of virgins a certain trick of fence—oh yes, don't you be afraid. Embarrassment! If there is any one embarrassed, it will not be me, and it will not be she. Why, she'll begin to wonder whether you are really one of the Macleods, if you show yourself nervous, apprehensive, frightened like this."

"And indeed, Stuart," said he, rising as if to shake off some weight of gloomy feeling, "I scarcely know what is the matter with me. I ought to be the happiest man in the world; and sometimes this very happiness seems so great that it is like to suffocate me—I cannot breathe fast enough; and then, again, I get into such unreasoning fears and troubles— Well, let us get out into the fresh air."

The major carefully smoothed his hat once more, and took up his cane. He followed Macleod down stairs—like Sancho Panza waiting on Don Quixote, as he himself expressed it; and then the two friends slowly sauntered away northward on this fairly clear and pleasant December morning.

"Your nerves are not in a healthy state, that's the fact, Macleod," said the major, as they walked along. "The climate of London is too exciting for you; a good, long, dull winter in Mull will restore your tone. But in the meantime don't cut my throat, or your own, or anybody else's."

"Am I likely to do that?" Macleod said, laughing.

"There was young Bouverie," the major continued, not heeding the question—"what a handsome young fellow he was when he joined us at Gawulpoor!—and he hadn't been in the place a week but he must needs go regular head over heels about our colonel's sister-in-law. An uncommon pretty woman she was, too—an Irish girl, and fond of riding; and dash me if that fellow didn't fairly try to break his neck again and again just that she should admire his pluck! He was as mad as a hatter about her. Well, one day two or three of us had been riding for two or three hours on a blazing hot morning, and we came to one of the irrigation reservoirs—big wells, you know—and what does he do but offer to bet twenty pounds he would dive into the well and swim about for ten minutes, till we hoisted him out at the end of the rope. I forget who took the bet, for none of us thought he would do it: but I believe he would have done

anything so that the story of his pluck would be carried to the girl, don't you know. Well, off went his clothes, and in he jumped into the ice-cold water. Nothing would stop him. But at the end of the ten minutes, when we hoisted up the rope, there was no Bouverie there. It appeared that on clinging on to the rope he had twisted it somehow, and suddenly found himself about to have his neck broken, so he had to shake himself free and plunge into the water again. When at last we got him out, he had had a longer bath than he had bargained for; but there was apparently nothing the matter with him—and he had won the money, and there would be a talk about him. However, two days afterward, when he was at dinner, he suddenly felt as though he had got a blow on the back of his head—so he told us afterward—and fell back insensible. That was the beginning of it. It took him five or six years to shake off the effects of that dip——”

“And did she marry him, after all?” Macleod said, eagerly.

“Oh dear, no! I think he had been invalided home not more than two or three months when she married Connolly, of the Seventy-first Madras Infantry. Then she ran away from him with some civilian fellow, and Connolly blew his brains out. That,” said the major, honestly, “is always a puzzle to me. How a fellow can be such an ass as to blow his brains out when his wife runs away from him beats my comprehension altogether. Now what I would do would be this: I would thank goodness I was rid of such a piece of baggage; I would get all the good-fellows I know, and give them a rattling fine dinner; and I would drink a bumper to her health and another bumper to her never coming back.”

“And I would send you our Donald, and he would play, ‘Cha till mi tuilich’ for you,” Macleod said.

“But as for blowing my brains out! Well,” the major added, with a philosophic air, “when a man is mad he cares neither for his own life nor for anybody else’s. Look at those cases you continually see in the papers: a young man is in love with a young woman; they quarrel, or she prefers some one else; what does he do but lay hold of her some evening and cut her throat—to show his great love for her—and then he coolly gives himself up to the police, and says he is quite content to be hanged.”

“Stuart,” said Macleod, laughing, “I don’t like this talk about hanging. You said a minute or two ago that I was mad.”

"More or less," observed the major, with absolute gravity; "as the lawyer said when he mentioned the Fifteen-acres park at Dublin."

"Well, let us get into a hansom," Macleod said. "When I am hanged you will ask them to write over my tombstone that I never kept anybody waiting for either luncheon or dinner."

The trim maid-servant who opened the door greeted Macleod with a pleasant smile; she was a sharp wench, and had discovered that lovers have lavish hands. She showed the two visitors into the drawing-room; Macleod silent, and listening intently; the one-eyed major observing everything, and perhaps curious to know whether the house of an actress differed from that of anybody else. He very speedily came to the conclusion that, in his small experience, he had never seen any house of its size so tastefully decorated and accurately managed as this simple home.

"But what's this!" he cried, going to the mantelpiece and taking down a drawing that was somewhat ostentatiously placed there. "Well! If this is English hospitality! By Jove! an insult to me, and my father, and my father's clan, that blood alone will wipe out. 'The Astonishment of Sandy MacAlister Mhor on beholding a Glimpse of Sunlight,' Look!"

He showed the rude drawing to Macleod—a sketch of a wild Highlander, with his hair on end, his eyes starting out of his head, and his hands uplifted in bewilderment. This work of art was the production of Miss Carry, who, on hearing the knock at the door, had whipped into the room, placed her bit of savage satire over the mantelpiece, and whipped out again. But her deadly malice so far failed of its purpose that, instead of inflicting any annoyance, it most effectually broke the embarrassment of Miss Gertrude's entrance and introduction to the major.

"Carry has no great love for the Highlands," she said, laughing and slightly blushing at the same time; "but she need not have prepared so cruel a welcome for you. Won't you sit down, Major Stuart? Papa will be here directly."

"I think it is uncommonly clever," the major said, fixing his one eye on the paper as if he would give Miss White distinctly to understand that he had not come to stare at her. "Perhaps she will like us better when she knows more about us."

"Do you think," said Miss White, demurely, "that it is

possible for any one born in the South to learn to like the bagpipes?"

"No," said Macleod, quickly—and it was not usual for him to break in in this eager way about a usual matter of talk—"that is all a question of association. If you had been brought up to associate the sound of the pipes with every memorable thing—with the sadness of a funeral, and the welcome of friends come to see you, and the pride of going away to war—then you would understand why 'Lord Lovat's Lament,' or the 'Farewell to Gibraltar,' or the 'Heights of Alma'—why these bring the tears to a Highlander's eyes. The pibrochs preserve our legends for us," he went on to say, in rather an excited fashion, for he was obviously nervous, and perhaps a trifle paler than usual. "They remind us of what our families have done in all parts of the world, and there is not one you do not associate with some friend or relative who is gone away, or with some great merry-making, or with the death of one who was dear to you. You never saw that—the boat taking the coffin across the loch, and the friends of the dead sitting with bowed heads, and the piper at the bow playing the slow Lament to the time of the oars. If you had seen that, you would know what the 'Cumhadh na Cloinne' is to a Highlander. And if you have a friend come to see you, what is it first tells you of his coming? When you can hear nothing for the waves, you can hear the pipes! And if you were going into a battle, what would put madness into your head but to hear the march that you know your brothers and uncles and cousins last heard when they marched on with a cheer to take death as it happened to come to them? You might as well wonder at the Highlanders loving the heather. That is not a very handsome flower."

Miss White was sitting quite calm and collected. A covert glance or two had convinced the major that she was entirely mistress of the situation. If there was any one nervous, embarrassed, excited, through this interview, it was not Miss Gertrude White.

"The other morning," she said, complacently, and she pulled down her dainty white cuffs another sixteenth of an inch, "I was going along Buckingham Palace Road, and I met a detachment—is a detachment right, Major Stuart?—of a Highland regiment. At least I supposed it was part of a Highland regiment, because they had eight pipers playing at their head; and I noticed that the cab horses were far

more frightened than they would have been at twice the noise coming from an ordinary band. I was wondering whether they might think it the roar of some strange animal—you know how a camel frightens a horse. But I envied the officer who was riding in front of the soldiers. He was a very handsome man; and I thought how proud he must feel to be at the head of those fine, stalwart fellows. In fact, I felt for a moment that I should like to have command of a regiment myself.

"Faith," said the major, gallantly, "I would exchange into that regiment, if I had to serve as a drummer-boy."

Embarrassed by this broad compliment? Not a bit of it. She laughed lightly, and then rose to introduce the two visitors to her father, who had just entered the room.

It was not to be expected that Mr. White, knowing the errand of his guests, should give them an inordinately effusive welcome; but he was gravely polite. He prided himself on being a man of common-sense, and he knew it was no use fighting against the inevitable. If his daughter would leave the stage, she would; and there was some small compensation in the fact that by her doing so she would become Lady Macleod. He would have less money to spend on trinkets two hundred years old; but he would gain something—a very little no doubt—from the reflected lustre of her social position.

"We were talking about officers, papa," she said, brightly, "and I was about to confess that I have always had a great liking for soldiers. I know if I had been a man I should have been a soldier. But do you know, Sir Keith, you were once very rude to me about your friend Lieutenant Ogilvie?"

Macleod started.

"I hope not," said he gravely.

"Oh yes, you were. Don't you remember the Caledonian Ball? I only remarked that Lieutenant Ogilvie, who seemed to me a bonnie boy, did not look as if he were a very formidable warrior; and you answered with some dark saying—what was it?—that nobody could tell what sword was in a scabbard until it was drawn?"

"Oh," said he, laughing somewhat nervously, "you forget: I was talking to the Duchess of Devonshire."

"And I am sure her Grace was much obliged to you for frightening her so," Miss White said, with a dainty smile.

Major Stuart was greatly pleased by the appearance and charming manner of this young lady. If Macleod, who was

confessedly a handsome young fellow, had searched all over England, he could not have chosen a fitter mate. But he was also distinctly of opinion—judging by his one eye only—that nobody needed to be alarmed about this young lady's exceeding sensitiveness and embarrassment before strangers. He thought she would on all occasions be fairly capable of holding her own. And he was quite convinced, too, that the beautiful clear eyes, under the long lashes, pretty accurately divined what was going forward. But what did this impression of the honest soldier's amount to? Only, in other words, that Miss Gertrude White, although a pretty woman, was not a fool.

Luncheon was announced, and they went into the other room, accompanied by Miss Carry, who had suffered herself to be introduced to Major Stuart with a certain proud sedateness. And now the major played the part of the accepted lover's friend to perfection. He sat next Miss White herself; and no matter what the talk was about, he managed to bring it round to something that redounded to Macleod's advantage. Macleod could do this, and Macleod could do that; it was all Macleod, and Macleod, and Macleod.

"And if you should ever come to our part of the world, Miss White," said the major—not letting his glance meet hers—"you will be able to understand something of the old loyalty and affection and devotion the people in the Highlands showed to their chiefs; for I don't believe there is a man, woman, or child about the place who would not rather have a hand cut off than that Macleod should have a thorn scratch him. And it is all the more singular, you know, that they are not Macleods. Mull is the country of the Macleans; and the Macleans and the Macleods had their fights in former times. There is a cave they will show you round the point from *Ru na Gaul* lighthouse that is called *Uamh-na-Ceann*—that is, the Cavern of the Skulls—where the Macleods murdered fifty of the Macleans, though Alastair Cro-tach, the humpbacked son of Macleod, was himself killed."

"I beg your pardon, Major Stuart," said Miss Carry, with a grand stateliness in her tone, "but will you allow me to ask if this is true? It is a passage I saw quoted in a book the other day, and I copied it out. It says something about the character of the people you are talking about."

She handed him the bit of paper; and he read these words: "*Trew it is, that thir Hlandish men ar of nature verie proud, suspicious, avaricious, full of decept and evill inventioun*"

each aganis his nychtbour, be what way soever he may circumvin him. Besydis all this, they ar sa crewall in taking of revenge that nather have they regard to person, eage, tyme, or caus; sa ar they generallie all sa far addictit to thair awin tyrannicall opinions that, in all respects, they exceed in creweltie the maist barbarous people that ever hes bene sen the begynning of the world."

"Upon my word," said the honest major, "it is a most formidable indictment. You had better ask Sir Keith about it."

He handed the paper across the table; Macleod read it, and burst out laughing.

"It is too true, Carry," said he. "We are a dreadful lot of people up there among the hills. Nothing but murder and rapine from morning till night."

"I was telling him this morning he would probably be hanged," observed the major, gravely.

"For what?" Miss White asked.

"Oh," said the major, carelessly, "I did not specify the offence. Cattle-lifting, probably."

Miss Carry's fierce onslaught was thus laughed away, and they proceeded to other matters; the major meanwhile not failing to remark that this luncheon differed considerably from the bread and cheese and glass of whiskey of a shooting-day in Mull. Then they returned to the drawing-room, and had tea there, and some further talk. The major had by this time quite abandoned his critical and observant attitude. He had succumbed to the enchantress. He was ready to declare that Gertrude White was the most fascinating woman he had ever met, while, as a matter of fact, she had been rather timidly making suggestions and asking his opinion all the time. And when they rose to leave, she said,—

"I am very sorry, Major Stuart, that this unfortunate accident should have altered your plans; but since you must remain in London, I hope we shall see you often before you go."

"You are very kind," said he.

"We cannot ask you to dine with us," she said, quite simply and frankly, "because of my engagements in the evening; but we are always at home at lunch-time, and Sir Keith knows the way."

"Thank you very much," said the major, as he warmly pressed her hand.

The two friends passed out into the street.

"My dear fellow," said the major, "you have been lucky—don't imagine I am humbugging you. A really handsome lass, and a thorough woman of the world, too—trained and fitted at every point; none of your farmyard beauties. But I say, Macleod—I say," he continued, solemnly, "won't she find it a trifle dull at Castle Dare?—the change, you know."

"It is not necessary that she should live at Dare," Macleod said.

"Oh, of course, you know your own plans best."

"I have none. All that is in the air as yet. And so you do not think I have made a mistake."

"I wish I was five-and-twenty, and could make a mistake like that," said the major, with a sigh.

Meanwhile Miss Carry had confronted her sister.

"So you have been inspected, Gerty. Do you think you passed muster?"

"Go away, and don't be impertinent, you silly girl!" said the other, good-naturedly.

Carry pulled a folded piece of paper from her pocket, and, advancing, placed it on the table.

"There," said she, "put that in your purse, and don't tell me you have not been warned, Gertrude White."

The elder sister did as she was bid; but indeed she was not thinking at that moment of the cruel and revengeful character of the Western Highlanders, which Miss Carry's quotation set forth in such plain terms. She was thinking that she had never before seen Glenogie look so soldier-like and handsome.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT A RAILWAY STATION.

THE few days of grace obtained by the accident that happened to Major Stuart fled too quickly away, and the time came for saying farewell. With a dismal apprehension Macleod looked forward to this moment. He had seen her on the stage bid a pathetic good-by to her lover, and there it was beautiful enough—with her shy coquetries, and her winning ways, and the timid, reluctant confession of her love.

But there was nothing at all beautiful about this ordeal through which he must pass. It was harsh and horrible. He trembled even as he thought of it.

The last day of his stay in London arrived ; he rose with a sense of some awful doom hanging over him that he could in nowise shake off. It was a strange day, too—the world of London vaguely shining through a pale fog, the sun a globe of red fire. There was hoar-frost on the window-ledges ; at last the winter seemed about to begin.

And then, as ill luck would have it, Miss White had some important business at the theatre to attend to, so that she could not see him till the afternoon ; and he had to pass the empty morning somehow.

“ You look like a man going to be hanged,” said the major, about noon. “ Come, shall we stroll down to the river now ? We can have a chat with your friend before lunch, and a look over his boat.”

Colonel Ross, being by chance at Erith, had heard of Macleod’s being in town, and had immediately come up in his little steam-yacht, the *Iris*, which now lay at anchor close to Westminster Bridge, on the Lambeth side. He had proposed, merely for the oddity of the thing, that Macleod and his friend the major should lunch on board, and young Ogilvie had promised to run up from Aldershot.

“ Macleod,” said the gallant soldier, as the two friends walked leisurely down towards the Thames, “ if you let this monomania get such a hold of you, do you know how it will end ? You will begin to show signs of having a conscience.”

“ What do you mean ? ” said he, absently.

“ Your nervous system will break down, and you will begin to have a conscience. That is a sure sign, in either a man or a nation. Man, don’t I see it all around us now in this way of looking at India and the colonies ! We had no conscience—we were in robust health as a nation—when we thrashed the French out of Canada, and seized India, and stole land just wherever we could put our fingers on it all over the globe ; but now it is quite different ; we are only educating these countries up to self-government ; it is all in the interest of morality that we protect them ; as soon as they wish to go we will give them our blessing—in short, we have got a conscience, because the national health is feeble and nervous. You look out, or you will get into the same condition. You will begin to ask whether it is right to shoot pretty little

birds in order to eat them ; you will become a vegetarian ; and you will take to goloshes."

"Good gracious !" said Macleod, waking up, "what is all this about ?"

"Rob Roy," observed the major, oracularly, "was a healthy man. I will make you a bet he was not much troubled by chilblains."

"Stuart," Macleod cried, "do you want to drive me mad ? What on earth are you talking about ?"

"Anything," the major confessed, frankly, "to rouse you out of your monomania, because I don't want to have my throat cut by a lunatic some night up at Castle Dare."

"Castle Dare," repeated Macleod, gloomily. "I think I shall scarcely know the place again ; and we have been away about a fortnight !"

No sooner had they got down to the landing-step on the Lambeth side of the river than they were descried from the deck of the beautiful little steamer, and a boat was sent ashore for them. Colonel Ross was standing by the tiny gangway to receive them. They got on board, and passed into the glass-surrounded saloon. There certainly was something odd in the notion of being anchored in the middle of the great city—absolutely cut off from it, and enclosed in a miniature floating world, the very sound of it hushed and remote. And, indeed, on this strange morning the big town looked more dreamlike than usual as they regarded it from the windows of this saloon—the buildings opal-like in the pale fog, a dusky glitter on the high towers of the Houses of Parliament, and some touches of rose red on the ripples of the yellow water around them.

Right over there was the very spot to which he had idly wandered in the clear dawn to have a look at the peacefully flowing stream. How long ago ? It seemed to him, looking back, somehow the morning of life—shining clear and beautiful, before any sombre anxieties and joys scarcely less painful had come to cloud the fair sky. He thought of himself at that time with a sort of wonder. He saw himself standing there, glad to watch the pale and glowing glory of the dawn, careless as to what the day might bring forth ; and he knew that it was another and an irrecoverable Macleod he was mentally regarding.

Well, when his friend Ogilvie arrived, he endeavored to assume some greater spirit and cheerfulness, and they had a pleasant enough luncheon party in the gently moving saloon.

Thereafter Colonel Ross was for getting up steam and taking them for a run somewhere ; but at this point Macleod begged to be excused for running away ; and so, having consigned Major Stuart to the care of his host for the moment, and having bade good-by to Ogilvie, he went ashore. He made his way up to the cottage in South Bank. He entered the drawing-room and sat down, alone.

When she came in, she said, with a quick anxiety, "You are not ill?"

"No, no," he said rising, and his face was haggard somewhat ; "but—but it is not pleasant to come to say good-by——"

"You must not take it so seriously as that," she said, with a friendly smile.

"My going away is like going into a grave," he said, slowly. "It is dark."

And then he took her two hands in his, and regarded her with such an intensity of look that she almost drew back, afraid.

"Sometimes," he said, watching her eyes, "I think I shall never see you again."

"Oh, Keith," said she, drawing her hands away, and speaking half playfully, "you really frighten me ! And even if you were never to see me again, wouldn't it be a very good thing for you ? You would have got rid of a bad bargain."

"It would not be a very good thing for me," he said, still regarding her.

"Oh, well, don't speak of it," said she, lightly ; "let us speak of all that is to be done in the long time that must pass before we meet——"

"But why '*must*' ?" said he, eagerly—"why '*must*' ?" If you knew how I looked forward to the blackness of this winter away up there—so far away from you that I shall forget the sound of your voice—oh ! you cannot know what it is to me ?"

He had sat down again, his eyes, with a sort of pained and hunted look in them, bent on the floor.

"But there is a '*must*,' you know," she said, cheerfully, "and we ought to be sensible folk and recognize it. You know I ought to have a probationary period, as it were—like a nun, you know, just to see if she is fit to——"

Here Miss White paused, with a little embarrassment ; but presently she charged the difficulty, and said, with a slight laugh,—

"To take the veil, in fact. You must give me time to become accustomed to a whole heap of things: if we were to do anything suddenly now, we might blunder into some great mistake, perhaps irretrievable. I must train myself by degrees for another kind of life altogether; and I am going to surprise you, Keith—I am indeed. If papa takes me to the Highlands next year, you won't recognize me at all. I am going to read up all about the Highlands, and learn the tartans, and the names of fishes and birds; and I will walk in the rain and try to think nothing about it; and perhaps I may learn a little Gaelic: indeed, Keith, when you see me in the Highlands, you will find me a thorough Highland-woman."

"You will never become a Highland-woman," he said, with a grave kindness. "Is it needful? I would rather see you as you are than playing a part."

Her eyes expressed some quick wonder, for he had almost quoted her father's words to her.

"You would rather see me as I am?" she said, demurely. "But what am I? I don't know myself."

"You are a beautiful and gentle-hearted Englishwoman," he said, with honest admiration—"a daughter of the South. Why should you wish to be anything else? When you come to us, I will show you a true Highland-woman—that is, my cousin Janet."

"Now you have spoiled all my ambition," she said, somewhat petulantly. "I had intended spending all the winter in training myself to forget the habits and feelings of an actress, and I was going to educate myself for another kind of life; and now I find that when I go to the Highlands you will compare me with your cousin Janet!"

"That is impossible," said he, absently, for he was thinking of the time when the summer seas would be blue again, and the winds soft, and the sky clear; and then he saw the white boat of the *Umpire* going merrily out to the great steamer to bring the beautiful stranger from the South to Castle Dare!

"Ah, well, I am not going to quarrel with you on this our last day together," she said, and she gently placed her soft white hand on the clinched fist that rested on the table. "I see you are in great trouble—I wish I could lessen it. And yet how could I wish that you could think of me less. even during the long winter evenings, when it will be so much more lonely for you than for me? But you must leave

me my hobby all the same; and you must think of me always as preparing myself and looking forward; for at least you know you will expect me to be able to sing a Highland ballad to your friends."

"Yes, yes," he said, hastily, "if it is all true—if it is all possible—what you speak of. Sometimes I think it is madness of me to fling away my only chance; to have everything I care for in the world near me, and to go away and perhaps never return. Sometimes I know in my heart that I shall never see you again—never after this day."

"Ah, now," said she, brightly—for she feared this black demon getting possession of him again—"I will kill that superstition right off. You *shall* see me after to-day; for as sure as my name is Gertrude White, I will go up to the railway station to-morrow morning and see you off. There!"

"You will?" he said, with a flush of joy on his face.

"But I don't want any one else to see me," she said, looking down.

"Oh, I will manage that," he said, eagerly. "I will get Major Stuart into the carriage ten minutes before the train starts."

"Colonel Ross?"

"He goes back to Erith to-night."

"And I will bring to the station," said she, with some shy color in her face, "a little present—if you should speak of me to your mother, you might give her this from me; it belonged to my mother."

Could anything have been more delicately devised than this tender and timid message?

"You have a woman's heart," he said.

And then in the same low voice she began to explain that she would like him to go to the theatre that evening, and that perhaps he would go alone; and would he do her the favor to be in a particular box? She took a piece of paper from her purse, and shyly handed it to him. How could he refuse?—though he flushed slightly. It was a favor she asked. "I will know where you are," she said.

And so he was not to bid good-by to her on this occasion, after all. But he bade good-by to Mr. White, and to Miss Carry, who was quite civil to him now that he was going away; and then he went out into the cold and gray December afternoon. They were lighting the lamps. But gaslight throws no cheerfulness on a grave.

He went to the theatre later on; and the talisman she

had given him took him into a box almost level with the stage, and so near to it that the glare of the footlights bewildered his eyes, until he retired into the corner. And once more he saw the puppets come and go, with the one live woman among them whose every tone of voice made his heart leap. And then this drawing-room scene, in which she comes in alone, and talking to herself? She sits down to the piano carelessly. Some one enters unperceived, and stands silent there, to listen to the singing. And this air that she sings, waywardly, like a light-hearted schoolgirl :—

“ Hi-ri-libhin o, Brae MacIntyre,
 Hi-ri-libhin o, Costly thy wooing!
 Thou’st slain the maid,
 Hug-o-rin-o, ’Tis thy undoing!
 Hi-ri-libhin o, Friends of my love,
 Hi-ri-libhin o, Do not upbraid him;
 He was leal
 Hug-o-rin-o, Chance betrayed him.”

Macleod’s breathing came quick and hard. She had not sung the ballad of the brave MacIntyre when formerly he had seen the piece. Did she merely wish him to know, by this arch rendering of the gloomy song, that she was pursuing her Highland studies? And then the last verse she sang in the Gaelic! He was so near that he could hear this adjuration to the unhappy lover to seek his boat and fly, steering wide of Jura and avoiding Mull :—

“ Hi-ri-libhin o, Buin Bàta,
 Hi-ri-libhin o, Fag an dàthaich,
 Seachain Mule,
 Hug-o-ri-no ; Sna taodh Jura ! ”

Was she laughing, then, at her pronunciation of the Gaelic when she carelessly rose from the piano, and, in doing so, directed one glance to him that made him quail? The foolish piece went on. She was more bright, vivacious, coquettish than ever: how could she have such spirits in view of the long separation that lay on his heart like lead? Then, at the end of the piece, there was a tapping at the door, and an envelope was handed in to him. It only contained a card, with the message “Good-night?” scrawled in pencil. It was the last time he ever was in any theatre.

Then that next morning—cold and raw and damp, with a blustering northwest wind that seemed to bring an angry

summons from the far seas. At the station his hand was trembling like the hand of a drunken man; his eyes wild and troubled; his face haggard. And as the moment arrived for the train to start, he became more and more excited.

"Come and take your place, Macleod," the major said. "There is no use worrying about leaving. We have eaten our cake. The frolic is at an end. All we can do is to sing, 'Then fare you well, my Mary Blane,' and put up with whatever is ahead. If I could only have a drop of real, genuine Talisker to steady my nerves——"

But here the major, who had been incidentally leaning out of the window, caught sight of a figure, and instantly he withdrew his head. Macleod disappeared.

That great, gaunt room—with the hollow footfalls of strangers, and the cries outside. His face was quite white when he took her hand.

"I am very late," she said, with a smile.

He could not speak at all. He fixed his eyes on hers with a strange intensity, as if he would read her very soul; and what could any one find there but a great gentleness and sincerity, and the frank confidence of one who had nothing to conceal?

"Gertrude," said he at last, "whatever happens to us two, you will never forget that I loved you?"

"I think I may be sure of that," she said, looking down.

They rang a bell outside.

"Good-by, then."

He tightly grasped the hand he held; once more he gazed into those clear and confiding eyes—with an almost piteously anxious look: then he kissed her and hurried away. But she was bold enough to follow. Her eyes were very moist. Her heart was beating fast. If Glenogie had there and then challenged her, and said, "*Come, then, sweetheart; will you fly with me? And the proud mother will meet you. And the gentle cousin will attend on you. And Castle Dare will welcome the young bride!*"—what would she have said? The moment was over. She only saw the train go gently away from the station; and she saw the piteous eyes fixed on hers; and while he was in sight she waved her handkerchief. When the train had disappeared she turned away with a sigh.

"Poor fellow," she was thinking to herself, "he is very much in earnest—far more in earnest than even poor Howson. It would break my heart if I were to bring him any trouble."

By the time she had got to the end of the platform, her thoughts had taken a more cheerful turn.

"Dear me," she was saying to herself, "I quite forgot to ask him whether my Gaelic was good!"

When she had got into the street outside, the day was brightening.

"I wonder," she was asking herself, "whether Carry would come and look at that exhibition of water-colors; and what would the cab fare be?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DISCLOSURE.

AND now he was all eagerness to brave the first dragon in his way—the certain opposition of this proud old lady at Castle Dare. No doubt she would stand aghast at the mere mention of such a thing; perhaps in her sudden indignation she might utter sharp words that would rankle afterwards in the memory. In any case he knew the struggle would be long, and bitter, and harassing; and he had not the skill of speech to persuasively bend a woman's will. There was another way—impossible, alas!—he had thought of. If only he could have taken Gertrude White by the hand—if only he could have led her up the hall, and presented her to his mother, and said, "Mother, this is your daughter; is she not fit to be the daughter of so proud a mother?"—the fight would have been over. How could any one withstand the appeal of those fearless and tender clear eyes?

Impatiently he waited for the end of dinner on the evening of his arrival; impatiently he heard Donald the piper lad, play the brave Salute—the wild, shrill yell overcoming the low thunder of the Atlantic outside, and he paid but little attention to the old and familiar *Cumhadh na Cloinne*. Then Hamish put the whiskey and the claret on the table, and withdrew. They were left alone.

"And now, Keith," said his cousin Janet, with the wise gray eyes grown cheerful and kind, "you will tell us about

all the people you saw in London; and was there much gayety going on? And did you see the Queen at all? and did you give any fine dinners?"

"How can I answer you all at once, Janet?" said he, laughing in a somewhat nervous way. "I did not see the Queen, for she was at Windsor; and I did not give any fine dinners, for it is not the time of year in London to give fine dinners; and indeed I spent enough money in that way when I was in London before. But I saw several of the friends who were very kind to me when I was in London in the summer. And do you remember, Janet, my speaking to you about the beautiful young lady—the actress I met at the house of Colonel Ross of Duntormie?"

"Oh yes, I remember very well."

"Because," said he—and his fingers were rather nervous as he took out a package from his breast-pocket—"I have got some photographs of her for the mother and you to see. But it is little of any one that you can understand from photographs. You would have to hear her talk, and see her manner, before you could understand why every one speaks so well of her, and why she is a friend with every one——"

He had handed the packet to his mother, and the old lady had adjusted her eye-glasses, and was turning over the various photographs.

"She is very good-looking," said Lady Macleod. "Oh yes, she is very good-looking. And that is her sister?"

"Yes."

Janet was looking over them too.

"But where did you get all the photographs of her Keith?" she said. "They are from all sorts of places—Scarborough, Newcastle, Brighton——"

"I got them from herself," said he.

"Oh do you know her so well?"

"I know her very well. She was the most intimate friend of the people whose acquaintance I first made in London," he said, simply, and then he turned to his mother; "I wish photographs could speak, mother, for then you might make her acquaintance; and as she is coming to the Highlands next year——"

"We have no theatre in Mull, Keith," Lady Macleod said, with a smile.

"But by that time she will not be an actress at all: did I not tell you that before?" he said, eagerly. "Did I not tell you that? She is going to leave the stage—perhaps sooner

or later, but certainly by that time ; and when she comes to the Highlands next year with her father, she will be travelling just like any one else. And I hope, mother, you won't let them think that we Highlanders are less hospitable than the people of London."

He made the suggestion in an apparently careless fashion, but there was a painfully anxious look in his eyes. Janet noticed that.

"It would be strange if they were to come to so unfrequented a place as the west of Mull," said Lady Macleod, somewhat coldly, as she put the photographs aside.

"But I have told them all about the place, and what they will see, and they are eagerly looking forward to it ; and you surely would not have them put up at the inn at Bunessan. mother ? "

"Really, Keith, I think you have been imprudent. It was little matter our receiving a bachelor friend like Norman Ogilvie, but I don't think we are quite in a condition to entertain strangers at Dare."

"No one objected to me as a stranger when I went to London," said he, proudly.

"If they are anywhere in the neighborhood," said Lady Macleod, "I should be pleased to show them all the attention in my power, as you say they were friendly with you in London ; but really, Keith, I don't think you can ask me to invite two strangers to Dare—"

"Then it is to the inn at Bunessan they must go ? " he asked.

"Now, auntie," said Janet Macleod, with a gentle voice, "you are not going to put poor Keith into a fix ; I know you won't do that. I see the whole thing ; it is all because Keith was so thorough a Highlander. They were talking about Scotland : and no doubt he said there was nothing in the country to be compared with our islands, and caves, and cliffs. And then they spoke of coming, and of course he threw open the doors of the house to them. He would not have been a Highlander if he had done anything else, auntie ; and I know you won't be the one to make him break off an invitation. And if we cannot give them grand entertainments at Dare, we can give them a Highland welcome, anyway."

This appeal to the Highland pride of the mother was not to be withstood.

"Very well, Keith," said she. "We shall do what we can for your friends, though it isn't much in this old place."

"She will not look at it that way," he said, eagerly, "I know that. She will be proud to meet you, mother, and to shake hands with you, and to go about with you, and do just whatever you are doing—"

Lady Macleod started.

"How long do you propose this visit should last?" she said.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, hastily. "But you know, mother, you would not hurry your guests; for I am sure you would be as proud as any one to show them that we had things worth seeing. We should take her to the cathedral at Iona on some moonlight night; and then some day we could go out to the Dubh Artach lighthouse—and you know how the men are delighted to see a new face—"

"You would never think of that, Keith," his cousin said. "Do you think a London young lady would have the courage to be swung on to the rocks and to climb up all those steps outside?"

"She has the courage for that or for anything," said he. "And then, you know, she would be greatly interested in the clouds of puffins and the skarts behind Staffa, and we would take her to the great caves in the cliffs at Gribun; and I have no doubt she would like to go out to one of the uninhabited islands."

Lady Macleod had preserved a stern silence. When she had so far yielded as to promise to ask those two strangers to come to Castle Dare on their round of the Western Islands, she had taken it for granted that their visit would necessarily be of the briefest; but the projects of which Keith Macleod now spoke seemed to suggest something like a summer passed at Dare. And he went on talking in this strain, nervously delighted with the pictures that each promised excursion called up. Miss White would be charmed with this, and delighted with that. Janet would find her so pleasant a companion; the mother would be inclined to pet her at first sight.

"She is already anxious to make your acquaintance mother," said he to the proud old dame who sat there ominously silent. "And she could think of no other message to send you than this—it belonged to her mother."

He opened the little package—of old lace, or something of that kind—and handed it to his mother; and at the same time, his impetuosity carrying him on, he said that perhaps,

the mother would write now and propose the visit in the summer.

At this Lady Macleod's surprise overcame her reserve.

"You must be mad, Keith! To write in the middle of winter and send an invitation for the summer! And really the whole thing is so extraordinary—a present coming to me from an absolute stranger—and that stranger an actress who is quite unknown to any one I know—"

"Mother, mother," he cried, "don't say any more. She has promised to be my wife."

Lady Macleod stared at him as if to see whether he had really gone mad, and rose and pushed back her chair.

"Keith," she said, slowly and with a cold dignity, "when you choose a wife, I hope I will be the first to welcome her, and I shall be proud to see you with a wife worthy of the name that you bear; but in the meantime I do not think that such a subject should be made the occasion of a foolish jest."

And with that she left the apartment, and Keith Macleod turned in a bewildered sort of fashion to his cousin. Janet Macleod had risen too; she was regarding him with anxious and troubled and tender eyes.

"Janet," said he, "it is no jest at all!"

"I know that," said she, in a low voice, and her face was somewhat pale. "I have known that. I knew it before you went away to England this last time."

And suddenly she went over to him and bravely held out her hand; and there were quick tears in the beautiful gray eyes.

"Keith," said she, "there is no one will be more proud to see you happy than I; and I will do what I can for you now, if you will let me, for I see your whole heart is set on it; and how can I doubt that you have chosen a good wife?"

"Oh Janet, if you could only see her and know her!"

She turned aside for a moment—only for a moment. When he next saw her face she was quite gay.

"You must know, Keith," said she, with a smile shining through the tears of the friendly eyes, "that women-folk are very jealous; and all of a sudden you come to auntie and me, and tell us that a stranger has taken away your heart from us and from Dare; and you must expect us to be angry and resentful just a little bit at first."

"I never could expect that from you, Janet," said he. "I knew that was impossible from you."

"As for auntie, then," she said, warmly, "is it not natural that she should be surprised and perhaps offended——"

"But she says she does not believe it—that I am making a joke of it——"

"That is only her way of protesting, you know," said the wise cousin. "And you must expect her to be angry and obdurate, because women have their prejudices, you know, Keith; and this young lady—well, it is a pity she is not known to some one auntie knows."

"She is known to Norman Ogilvie, and to dozens of Norman Ogilvie's friends, and Major Stuart has seen her," said he, quickly; and then he drew back. "But that is nothing. I do not choose to have any one to vouch for her."

"I know that; I understand that, Keith," Janet Macleod said, gently. "It is enough for me that you have chosen her to be your wife; I know you would choose a good woman to be your wife; and it will be enough for your mother when she comes to reflect. But you must be patient."

"Patient I would be, if it concerned myself alone," said he; "but the reflection—the insult of the doubt——"

"Now, now, Keith," said she, "don't let the hot blood of the Macleods get the better of you. You must be patient, and considerate. If you will sit down now quietly, and tell me all about the young lady, I will be your ambasssador, if you like; and I think I will be able to persuade auntie."

"I wonder if there ever was any woman as kind as you are, Janet?" said he, looking at her with a sort of wondering admiration.

"You must not say that any more now," she said, with a smile. "You must consider the young lady you have chosen as perfection in all things. And this is a small matter. If auntie is difficult to persuade, and should protest, and so forth, what she says will not hurt me, whereas it might hurt you very sorely. And now you will tell me all about the young lady, for I must have my hands full of arguments when I go to your mother."

And so this Court of Inquiry was formed, with one witness not altogether unprejudiced in giving his evidence, and with a judge ready to become the accomplice of the witness at any point. Somehow Macleod avoided speaking of Gertrude White's appearance. Janet was rather a plain woman, despite those tender Celtic eyes. He spoke rather of her filial duty and her sisterly affection; he minutely described her qualities as a house-mistress; and he was enthusiastic

about the heroism she had shown in determining to throw aside the glittering triumphs of her calling to live a simpler and wholesomer life. That passage in the career of Miss Gertrude White somewhat puzzled Janet Macleod. If it were the case that the ambitions and jealousies and simulated emotions of a life devoted to art had a demoralizing and degrading effect on the character, why had not the young lady made the discovery a little earlier? What was the reason of her very sudden conversion? It was no doubt very noble on her part, if she really were convinced that this continual stirring up of sentiment without leading to practical issues had an unwholesome influence on her woman's nature, to voluntarily surrender all the intoxication of success, with its praises and flatteries. But why was the change in her opinion so sudden? According to Macleod's own account, Miss Gertrude White, when he first went up to London, was wholly given over to the ambition of succeeding in her profession. She was then the "white slave." She made no protest against the repeatedly announced theories of her father to the effect that an artist ceased to live for himself or herself, and became merely a medium for the expression of the emotions of others. Perhaps the gentle cousin Janet would have had a clearer view of the whole case if she had known that Miss Gertrude White's awakening doubts as to the wholesomeness of simulated emotions on the human soul were strictly coincident in point of time with her conviction that at any moment she pleased she might call herself Lady Macleod.

With all the art he knew he described the beautiful small courtesies and tender ways of the little household at Rose Bank; and he made it appear that this young lady, brought up amidst the sweet observances of the South, was making an enormous sacrifice in offering to brave, for his sake, the transference to the harder and harsher ways of the North.

"And, you know, Keith, she speaks a good deal for her self," Janet Macleod said, turning over the photographs and looking at them perhaps a little wistfully. "It is a pretty face. It must make many friends for her. If she were here herself now, I don't think auntie would hold out for a moment."

"That is what I know," said he, eagerly. "That is why I am anxious she should come here. And if it were only possible to bring her now, there would be no more trouble; and I think we could get her to leave the stage—at least I would try. But how could we ask her to Dare in the winter

time? The sea and the rain would frighten her, and she would never consent to live here. And perhaps she needs time to quite make up her mind. She said she would educate herself all the winter through, and that, when I saw her again, she would be a thorough Highland woman. That shows you how willing she is to make any sacrifice if she thinks it right."

"But if she is convinced," said Janet, doubtfully, "that she ought to leave the stage, why does she not do so at once? You say her father has enough money to support the family?"

"Oh yes, he has," said Macleod; and then he added, with some hesitation, "well, Janet, I did not like to press that. She has already granted so much. But I might ask her."

At this moment Lady Macleod's maid came into the hall and said that her mistress wished to see Miss Macleod.

"Perhaps auntie thinks I am conspiring with you Keith," she said, laughing, when the girl had gone. "Well, you will leave the whole thing in my hands, and I will do what I can. And be patient and reasonable, Keith, even if your mother won't hear of it for a day or two. We women are very prejudiced against each other, you know; and we have quick tempers, and we want a little coaxing and persuasion—that is all."

"You have always been a good friend to me, Janet," he said.

"And I hope it will all turn out for your happiness, Keith," she said, gently, as she left.

But as for Lady Macleod, when Janet reached her room, the haughty old dame was "neither to hold nor to bind." There was nothing she would not have done for this favorite son of hers but this one thing. Give her consent to such a marriage? The ghosts of all the Macleods of Dare would call shame on her!

"Oh, auntie," said the patient Janet, "he has been a good son to you; and you must have known he would marry some day."

"Marry?" said the old lady, and she turned a quick eye on Janet herself. "I was anxious to see him married; and when he was choosing a wife I think he might have looked nearer home, Janet."

"What a wild night it is!" said Janet Macleod quickly, and she went for a moment to the window. "The *Dunara*

will be coming round the Mull of Cantire just about now. And where is the present, auntie, that the young lady sent you? You must write and thank her for that, at all events; and shall I write the letter for you in the morning?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

LADY MACLEOD remained obdurate; Janet went about the house with a sad look on her face; and Macleod, tired of the formal courtesy that governed the relations between his mother and himself, spent most of his time in snipe and duck shooting about the islands—braving the wild winds and wilder seas in a great, open lugsailed boat, the *Umpire* having long been sent to her winter-quarters. But the harsh, rough life had its compensations. Letters came from the South—treasures to be pored over night after night with an increasing wonder and admiration. Miss Gertrude White was a charming letter-writer; and now there was no restraint at all over her frank confessions and playful humors. Her letters were a prolonged chat—bright, rambling, merry, thoughtful, just as the mood occurred. She told him of her small adventures and the incidents of her everyday life, so that he could delight himself with vivid pictures of herself and her surroundings. And again and again she hinted rather than said that she was continually thinking of the Highlands, and of the great change in store for her.

"Yesterday morning," she wrote, "I was going down the Edgeware Road, and whom should I see but two small boys, dressed as young Highlanders, staring into the window of a toy-shop. Stalwart young fellows they were, with ruddy complexions and brown legs, and their Glengarries coquettishly placed on the side of their head; and I could see at once that their plain kilt was no holiday dress. How could I help speaking to them? I thought perhaps they had come from Mull. And so I went up to them and asked if they would let me buy a toy for each of them. 'We dot money,' says the younger, with a bold stare at my impertinence. 'But you can't refuse to accept a present from a lady?' I said. 'Oh

no, ma'am,' said the elder boy, and he politely raised his cap ; and the accent of his speech—well, it made my heart jump. But I was very nearly disappointed when I got them into the shop ; for I asked what their name was ; and they answered 'Lavender.' 'Why, surely, that is not a Highland, name,' I said. 'No, ma'am,' said the elder lad ; 'but my mamma is from the Highlands, and we are from the Highlands, and we are going back to spend the New-year at home.' 'And where is your home ?' I asked ; but I have forgotten the name of the place ; I understood it was somewhere away in the North. And then I asked them if they had ever been to Mull. 'We have passed it in the *Clansman*,' said the elder boy. 'And do you know one Sir Keith Macleod there ?' I asked. 'Oh no, ma'am,' said he, staring at me with his clear blue eyes as if I was a very stupid person, 'The Macleods are from Skye.' 'But surely one of them may live in Mull,' I suggested. 'The Macleods are from Skye,' he maintained, 'and my papa was at Dunvegan last year.' Then came the business of choosing the toys ; and the smaller child would have a boat, though his elder brother laughed at him, and said something about a former boat of his having been blown out into Loch Rogue—which seemed to me a strange name for even a Highland loch. But the elder lad, he must needs have a sword ; and when I asked him what he wanted that for, he said, quite proudly, 'To kill the Frenchmen with.' 'To kill Frenchmen with ?' I said ; for this young fire-eater seemed to mean what he said. 'Yes, ma'am,' said he, 'for they shoot the sheep out on the Flannan Islands when no one sees them ; but we will catch them some day.' I was afraid to ask him where the Flannan Islands were, for I could see he was already regarding me as a very ignorant person ; so I had their toys tied up for them, and packed them off home. 'And when you get home,' I said to them, 'you will give my compliments to your mamma, and say that you got the ship and the sword from a lady who has a great liking for the Highland people.' 'Yes, ma'am,' says he, touching his cap again with a proud politeness ; and then they went their ways, and I saw them no more."

Then the Christmas-time came, with all its mystery, and friendly observances, and associations ; and she described to him how Carry and she were engaged in decorating certain schools in which they were interested, and how a young curate had paid her a great deal of attention, until some one went

and told him, as a cruel joke, that Miss White was a celebrated dancer at a music-hall.

Then, on Christmas morning, behold, the very first snow of the year! She got up early; she went out alone; the holiday world of London was not yet awake.

"I never in my life saw anything more beautiful," she wrote to him, "than Regent's Park this morning, in a pale fog, with just a sprinkling of snow on the green of the grass, and one great yellow mansion shining through the mist—the sunlight on it—like some magnificent distant palace. And I said to myself, if I were a poet or a painter I would take the common things, and show people the wonder and the beauty of them; for I believe the sense of wonder is a sort of light that shines in the soul of the artist; and the least bit of the 'denying spirit'—the utterance of the word *connu*—snuffs it out at once. But then, dear Keith, I caught myself asking what I had to do with all these dreams, and these theories that papa would like to have talked about. What had I to do with art? And then I grew miserable. Perhaps the loneliness of the park, with only those robust, hurrying strangers crossing, blowing their fingers, and pulling their cravats closer, had affected me; or perhaps it was that I suddenly found how helpless I am by myself. I want a sustaining hand, Keith; and that is now far away from me. I can do anything with myself of set purpose, but it doesn't last. If you remind me that one ought generously to overlook the faults of others—I generously overlook the faults of others—for five minutes. If you remind me that to harbor jealousy and envy is mean and contemptible, I make an effort, and throw out all jealous and envious thoughts—for five minutes. And so you see I got discontented with myself; and I hated two men who were calling loud jokes at each other as they parted different ways; and I marched home through the fog, feeling rather inclined to quarrel with somebody. By the way, did you ever notice that you often can detect the relationship between people by their similar mode of walking, and that more easily than by any likeness of face? As I strolled home, I could tell which of the couples of men walking before me were brothers by the similar bending of the knee and the similar gait, even when their features were quite unlike. There was one man whose fashion of walking was really very droll; his right knee gave a sort of preliminary shake as if it was uncertain which way the foot wanted to go. For the life of me I could not help imitating

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him ; and then I wondered what his face would be like if he were suddenly to turn round and catch me."

That still dream of Regent's Park in sunlight and snow he carried about with him as a vision—a picture—even amidst the blustering westerly winds, and the riven seas that sprung over the rocks and swelled and roared away into the caves of Gribun and Bourg. There was no snow as yet up here at Dare, but wild tempests shaking the house to its foundations, and brief gleams of stormy sunlight lighting up the gray spindrift as it was whirled shoreward from the breaking seas ; and then days of slow and mournful rain, with Staffa, and Lunga, and the Dutchman become mere dull patches of blurred purple—when they were visible at all—on the leaden-hued and coldly rushing Atlantic.

"I have passed through the gates of the Palace of Art," she wrote, two days later, from the calmer and sunnier South ; "and I have entered its mysterious halls, and I have breathed for a time the hushed atmosphere of wonderland. Do you remember meeting a Mr. Lemuel at any time at Mrs. Ross's—a man with a strange, gray, tired face, and large, wan, blue eyes, and an air as if he were walking in a dream ? Perhaps not ; but, at all events, he is a great painter, who never exhibits to the vulgar crowd, but who is worshipped by a select circle of devotees ; and his house is a temple dedicated to high art, and only profound believers are allowed to cross the threshold. Oh dear me ! I am not a believer ; but how can I help that ? Mr. Lemuel is a friend of papa's, however ; they have mysterious talks over milk-jugs of colored stone, and small pictures with gilt skies, and angels in red and blue. Well, yesterday he called on papa, and requested his permission to ask me to sit—or, rather, stand—for the heroine of his next great work, which is to be an allegorical one, taken from the 'Faery Queen' or the 'Morte d'Arthur,' or some such book. I protested ; it was no use. 'Good gracious, papa,' I said, 'do you know what he will make of me ? He will give me a dirty brown face, and I shall wear a dirty green dress ; and no doubt I shall be standing beside a pool of dirty blue water, with a purple sky overhead, and a white moon in it. The chances are he will dislocate my neck, and give me gaunt cheeks like a corpse, with a serpent under my foot, or a flaming dragon stretching his jaws behind my back.' Papa was deeply shocked at my levity. Was it for me, an artist (bless the mark !), to baulk the high aims of art ? Besides.

it was vaguely hinted that, to reward me, certain afternoon-parties were to be got up ; and then, when I had got out of Merlin-land, and assured myself I was human by eating lunch, I was to meet a goodly company of distinguished folk—great poets, and one or two more mystic painters, a dilettante duke, and the nameless crowd of worshippers who would come to sit at the feet of all these, and sigh adoringly, and shake their heads over the Philistinism of English society. I don't care for ugly mediæval maidens myself, nor for allegorical serpents, nor for bloodless men with hollow cheeks, supposed to represent soldierly valor ; if I were an artist, I would rather show people the beauty of a common brick wall when the red winter sunset shines along it. But perhaps that is only my ignorance, and I may learn better before Mr. Lemuel has done with me."

When Macleod first read this passage, a dark expression came over his face. He did not like this new project.

"And so, yesterday afternoon," the letter continued, "papa and I went to Mr. Lemuel's house, which is only a short way from here ; and we entered, and found ourselves in a large circular and domed hall, pretty nearly dark, and with a number of closed doors. It was all hushed, and mysterious, and dim ; but there was a little more light when the man opened one of these doors and showed us into a chamber—or, rather, one of a series of chambers—that seemed to me at first like a big child's toy-house, all painted and gilded with red and gold. It was bewilderingly full of objects that had no ostensible purpose. You could not tell whether any one of these rooms was dining-room, or drawing-room, or anything else ; it was all a museum of wonderful cabinets filled with different sorts of ware, and trays of uncut precious stones, and Eastern jewelry, and what not ; and then you discovered that in the panels of the cabinets were painted series of allegorical heads on a gold background ; and then perhaps you stumbled on a painted glass window where no window should be. It was a splendid blaze of color, no doubt. One began to dream of Byzantine emperors, and Moorish conquerors, and Constantinople gilt domes. But then—mark the dramatic effect !—away in the blaze of the farther chamber appears a solemn, slim, bowed figure, dressed all in black—the black velvet coat seemed even blacker than black—and the mournful-eyed man approached, and he gazed upon us a grave welcome from the pleading, affected, tired eyes.

He had a slight cough, too, which I rather fancied was assumed for the occasion. Then we all sat down, and he talked to us in a low, sad, monotonous voice ; and there was a smell of frankincense about—no doubt a band of worshippers had lately been visiting at the shrine ; and, at papa's request, he showed me some of his trays of jewels with a wearied air. And some drawings of Botticelli that papa had been speaking about ; would he look at them now ? Oh, dear Keith, the wickedness of the human imagination ! as he went about in this limp and languid fashion, in the hushed room, with the old-fashioned scent in the air, I wished I was a street boy. I wished I could get close behind him, and give a sudden yell ! Would he fly into bits ? Would he be so startled into naturalness as to swear ? And all the time that papa and he talked, I dared scarcely lift my eyes ; for I could not but think of the effect of that wild 'Hi !' And what if I had burst into a fit of laughter without any apparent cause ? ”

Apparently Miss White had not been much impressed by her visit to Mr. Lemuel's palace of art, and she made thereafter but slight mention of it, though she had been prevailed upon to let the artist borrow the expression of her face for his forthcoming picture. She had other things to think about now, when she wrote to Castle Dare.

For one day Lady Macleod went into her son's room and said to him, “ Here is a letter, Keith, which I have written to Miss White. I wish you to read it.”

He jumped to his feet, and hastily ran his eyes over the letter. It was a trifle formal, it is true ; but it was kind, and it expressed the hope that Miss White and her father would next summer visit Castle Dare. The young man threw his arms round his mother's neck and kissed her. “ That is like a good mother,” said he. “ Do you know how happy she will be when she receives this message from you ? ”

Lady Macleod left him the letter to address. He read it over carefully ; and though he saw that the handwriting was the handwriting of his mother, he knew that the spirit that had prompted these words was that of the gentle cousin Janet.

This concession had almost been forced from the old lady by the patience and mild persistence of Janet Macleod ; but if anything could have assured her that she had acted properly in yielding, it was the answer which Miss Gertrude White sent in return. Miss White wrote that letter several times over before sending it off, and it was a clever piece of

composition. The timid expressions of gratitude ; the hints of the writer's sympathy with the romance of the Highlands and the Highland character ; the deference shown by youth to age ; and here and there just the smallest glimpse of humor, to show that Miss White, though very humble and respectful and all that, was not a mere fool. Lady Macleod was pleased by this letter. She showed it to her son one night at dinner. "It is a pretty hand," she remarked, critically.

Keith Macleod read it with a proud heart. "Can you not gather what kind of woman she is from that letter alone?" he said, eagerly. "I can almost hear her talk in it. Janet, will you read it too?"

Janet Macleod took the small sheet of perfumed paper and read it calmly, and handed it back to her aunt. "It is a nice letter," said she. "We must try to make Dare as bright as maybe when she comes to see us, that she will not go back to England with a bad account of the Highland people." That was all that was said at the time about the promised visit of Miss Gertrude White to Castle Dare. It was only as a visitor that Lady Macleod had consented to receive her. There was no word mentioned on either side of anything further than that. Mr. White and his daughter were to be in the Highlands next summer ; they would be in the neighborhood of Castle Dare ; Lady Macleod would be glad to entertain them for a time, and make the acquaintance of two of her son's friends. At all events, the proud old lady would be able to see what sort of woman this was whom Keith Macleod had chosen to be his wife.

And so the winter days and nights and weeks dragged slowly by ; but always, from time to time, came those merry and tender and playful letters from the South, which he listened to rather than read. It was her very voice that was speaking to him, and in imagination he went about with her. He strolled with her over the crisp grass, whitened with hoarfrost, of the Regent's Park ; he hurried home with her in the chill gray afternoons—the yellow gas-lamps being lit—to the little tea-table. When she visited a picture gallery, she sent him a full report of that, even.

"Why is it," she asked, "that one is so delighted to look a long distance, even when the view is quite uninteresting? I wonder if that is why I greatly prefer landscapes to figure subjects. The latter always seem to me to be painted from models just come from the Hampstead Road. There was

scarcely a sea-piece in the exhibition that was not spoiled by figures, put in for the sake of picturesqueness, I suppose. Why, when you are by the sea you want to be alone, surely ! Ah, if I could only have a look at those winter seas you speak of ! ”

He did not echo that wish at all. Even as he read he could hear the thunderous booming of the breakers into the giant caves. Was it for a pale rose-leaf to brave that fell wind that tore the waves into spindrift, and howled through the lonely chasms of Ben-an-Sloich ?

To one of these precious documents, written in the small, neat hand on pink-toned and perfumed paper, a postscript was added : “ If you keep my letters,” she wrote, and he laughed when he saw that *if*, “ I wish you would go back to the one in which I told you of papa and me calling at Mr. Lemuel’s house, and I wish, dear Keith, you would burn it. I am sure it was very cruel and unjust. One often makes the mistake of thinking people affected when there is no affectation about them. And if a man has injured his health and made an invalid of himself, through his intense and constant devotion to his work, surely that is not anything to be laughed at ? Whatever Mr. Lemuel may be, he is, at all events, desperately in earnest. The passion that he has for his art, and his patience and concentration and self-sacrifice, seems to me to be nothing less than noble. And so, dear Keith, will you please to burn that impertinent letter ? ”

Macleod sought out the letter and carefully read it over, He came to the conclusion that he could see no just reason for complying with her demand. Frequently first impressions are best.

CHAPTER XXX.

A GRAVE.

IN the by-gone days, this eager, active, stout-limbed young fellow had met the hardest winter with a glad heart. He rejoiced in its thousand various pursuits ; he set his teeth against the driving hail ; he laughed at the drenching spray that sprung high over the bows of his boat ; and what

harm ever came to him if he took the short-cut across the upper reaches of Loch Scridain, wading waist-deep through a mile of sea-water on a bitter January day? And where was the loneliness of his life when always, wherever he went by sea or shore, he had these old friends around him—the red-beaked sea-pyots whirring along the rocks; and the startled curlews, whistling their warning note across the sea; and the shy duck swimming far out on the smooth lochs; to say nothing of the black game that would scarcely move from their perch on the larch-trees as he approached, and the deer that were more distinctly visible on the far heights of Ben-an-Sloich when a slight sprinkling of snow had fallen?

But now all this was changed. The awfulness of the dark winter-time amidst those Northern seas overshadowed him. "It is like going into a grave," he had said to her. And, with all his passionate longing to see her and have speech of her once more, how could he dare to ask her to approach these dismal solitudes? Sometimes he tried to picture her coming, and to read in imagination the look on her face. See now!—how she clings terrified to the side of the big open packet-boat that crosses the Frith of Lorn, and she dares not look abroad on the howling waste of waves. The mountains of Mull rise sad and cold and distant before her; there is no bright glint of sunshine to herald her approach. This small dog-cart, now: it is a frail thing with which to plunge into the wild valleys, for surely a gust of wind might whirl into the chasm of roaring waters below Glen-More: who that has ever seen Glen-More on a lowering January day will ever forget it—its silence, its loneliness, its vast and lifeless gloom? Her face is pale now; she sits speechless and awestricken; for the mountain-walls that overhang this sombre ravine seem ready to fall on her, and there is an awful darkness spreading along their summits under the heavy swathes of cloud. And then those black lakes far down in the lone hollows, more death-like and terrible than any tourist-haunted Loch Coruisk: would she not turn to him and, with trembling hands, implore him to take her back and away to the more familiar and bearable South? He began to see all these things with her eyes. He began to fear the awful things of the winter-time and the seas. The glad heart had gone out of him.

Even the beautiful aspects of the Highland winter had something about them—an isolation, a terrible silence—that he grew almost to dread. What was this strange thing, for

example? Early in the morning he looked from the windows of his room, and he could have imagined he was not at Dare at all. All the familiar objects of sea and shore had disappeared; this was a new world—a world of fantastic shapes, all moving and unknown—a world of vague masses of gray, though here and there a gleam of lemon-color shining through the fog showed that the dawn was reflected on a glassy sea. Then he began to make out the things around him. That great range of purple mountains was Ulva—Ulva transfigured and become Alpine! Then those wan gleams of yellow light on the sea?—he went to the other window, and behold! the heavy bands of cloud that lay across the unseen peaks of Ben-an-Sloich had parted, and there was a blaze of clear, metallic, green sky; and the clouds bordering on that gleam of light were touched with a smoky and stormy saffron-hue that flashed and changed amidst the seething and twisting shapes of the fog and the mist. He turned to the sea again—what phantom-ship was this that appeared in mid-air, and apparently moving when there was no wind? He heard the sound of oars; the huge vessel turned out to be only the boat of the Gometra men going out to the lobster-traps. The yellow light on the glassy plain waxes stronger; new objects appear through the shifting fog; until at last a sudden opening shows him a wonderful thing far away—apparently at the very confines of the world—and awful in its solitary splendor. For that is the distant island of Staffa, and it has caught the colors of the dawn; and amidst the cold grays of the sea it shines a pale, transparent rose.

He would like to have sent her, if he had got any skill of the brush, some brief memorandum of that beautiful thing; but indeed, and in any case, that was not the sort of painting she seemed to care for just then. Mr. Lemuel, and his Palace of Art, and his mediæval saints, and what not, which had all for a time disappeared from Miss White's letters, began now to monopolize a good deal of space there; and there was no longer any impertinent playfulness in her references, but, on the contrary, a respect and admiration that occasionally almost touched enthusiasm. From hints more than statements Macleod gathered that Miss White had been made much of by the people frequenting Mr. Lemuel's house. She had there met one or two gentlemen who had written very fine things about her in the papers; and certain highly distinguished people had been good enough to send her cards

of invitation ; and she had once or twice been persuaded to read some piece of dramatic poetry at Mr. Lemuel's afternoon parties ; and she even suggested that Mr. Lemuel had almost as much as said that he would like to paint her portrait. Mr. Lemuel had also offered her, but she had refused to accept, a small but marvellous study by Pinturicchio, which most people considered the gem of his collection.

Macleod, reading and re-reading these letters many a time in the solitudes of western Mull, came to the opinion that there must be a good deal of amusement going on in London. And was it not natural that a young girl should like to be petted, and flattered, and made much of ? Why should he complain when she wrote to say how she enjoyed this and was charmed by that ? Could he ask her to exchange that gay and pleasant life for this hibernation in Mull ? Sometimes for days together the inhabitants of Castle Dare literally lived in the clouds. Dense bands of white mist lay all along the cliffs ; and they lived in a semi-darkness, with the mournful dripping of the rain on the wet garden, and the mournful wash of the sea all around the shores. He was glad, then, that Gertrude White was not at Castle Dare.

But sometimes, when he could not forbear opening his heart to her, and pressing her for some more definite assurance as to the future, the ordinary playful banter in which she generally evaded his urgency gave place to a tone of coldness that astonished and alarmed him. Why should she so cruelly resent this piteous longing of his ? Was she no longer, then, so anxious to escape from the thralldom that had seemed so hateful to her ?

"Hamish," said Macleod, abruptly, after reading one of these letters, "come, now, we will go and overhaul the *Umpire*, for you know she is to be made very smart this summer ; for we have people coming all the way from London to Dare, and they must not think we do not know in Mull how to keep a yacht in shipshape."

"Ay, sir," said Hamish ; "and if we do not know that in Mull, where will they be likely to know that ?"

"And you will get the cushions in the saloon covered again ; and we will have a new mirror for the ladies' cabin, and Miss Macleod, if you ask her, will put a piece of lace round the top of that, to make it look like a lady's room. And then, you know, Hamish, you can show the little boy Johnny Wickes how to polish the brass ; and he will polish the brass in the ladies' cabin until it is as white as silver.

Because, you know, Hamish, they have very fine yachts in the South. They are like hotels on the water. We must try to be as smart as we can."

"I do not know about the hotels," said Hamish, scornfully. "And perhaps it is a fine thing to hef a hotel; and Mr. M'Arthur they say he is a ferry rich man, and he has ferry fine pictures too; but I was thinking that if I will be off the Barra Head on a bad night—between the Sgirobh bhan and the Barra Head on a bad night—it is not any hotel I will be wishing that I wass in, but a good boat. And the *Umpire* she is a good boat; and I hef no fear of going anywhere in the world with her—to London or to Inverary, ay, or the Queen's own castle on the island—and she will go there safe, and she will come back safe; and if she is not a hotel—well, perhaps she will not be a hotel; but she is a fine good boat, and she has swinging lamps whatever."

But even the presence of the swinging-lamps, which Hamish regarded as the highest conceivable point of luxury, did little to lessen the dolorousness of the appearance of the poor old *Umpire*. As Macleod, seated in the stern of the gig, approached her, she looked like some dingy old hulk relegated to the duty of keeping stores. Her topmast and bowsprit removed; not a stitch of cord on her; only the black iron shrouds remaining of all her rigging; her skylights and companion-hatch covered with waterproof—it was a sorry spectacle. And then when they went below, even the swinging-lamps were blue-moulded and stiff. There was an odor of damp straw throughout. All the cushions and carpets had been removed; there was nothing but the bare wood of the floor and the couches and the table; with a match-box saturated with wet, an empty wine-bottle, a newspaper five months old, a rusty corkscrew, a patch of dirty water—the leakage from the skylight overhead.

That was what Hamish saw.

What Macleod saw, as he stood there absently staring at the bare wood, was very different. It was a beautiful, comfortable saloon that he saw, all brightly furnished and gilded, and there was a dish of flowers—heather and rowan-berries intermixed—on the soft red cover of the table. And who is this that is sitting there, clad in sailor-like blue and white, and laughing, as she talks in her soft English speech? He is telling her that, if she means to be a sailor's bride, she must give up the wearing of gloves on board ship, although, to be sure, those gloved small hands look pretty enough as they

rest on the table and play with a bit of bell-heather. How bright her smile is. She is in a mood for teasing people. The laughing face, but for the gentleness of the eyes, would be audacious. They say that the width between those long-lashed eyes is a common peculiarity of the artist's face ; but she is no longer an artist ; she is only the brave young yachtswoman who lives at Castle Dare. The shepherds know her, and answer her in the Gaelic when she speaks to them in passing ; the sailors know her, and would adventure their lives to gratify her slightest wish ; and the bearded fellows who live their solitary life far out at Dubh Artach lighthouse, when she goes out to them with a new parcel of books and magazines, do not know how to show their gladness at the very sight of her bonnie face. There was once an actress of the same name, but this is quite a different woman. And to-morrow—do you know what she is going to do to-morrow?—to-morrow she is going away in this very yacht to a loch in the distant island of Lewis, and she is going to bring back with her some friends of hers who live there ; and there will be high holiday at Castle Dare. An actress? Her cheeks are too sun-browned for the cheeks of an actress.

"Well, sir?" Hamish said, at length ; and Macleod started.

"Very well, then," he said, impatiently, "why don't you go on deck and find out where the leakage of the skylight is?"

Hamish was not used to being addressed in this fashion, and walked away with a proud and hurt air. As he ascended the companion-way, he was muttering to himself in his native tongue,—

"Yes, I am going to find out where the leakage is, but perhaps it would be easier to find out below where the leakage is. If there is something the matter with the keel, is it the cross-trees you will go to to look for it? But I do not know what has come to the young master of late."

When Keith Macleod was alone, he sat down on the wooden bench and took out a letter, and tried to find there some assurance that this beautiful vision of his would some day be realized. He read it and re-read it ; but his anxious scrutiny only left him the more disheartened. He went up on deck. He talked to Hamish in a perfunctory manner about the smartening up of the *Empire*. He appeared to have lost interest in that already.

And then again he would seek relief in hard work, and try to forget altogether this hated time of enforced absence.

One night word was brought by some one that the typhoid fever had broken out in the ill-drained cottages of Iona, and he said at once that next morning he would go round to Bunnissan and ask the sanitary inspector there to be so kind as to inquire into this matter, and see whether something could not be done to improve these hovels.

"I am sure the duke does not know of it, Keith," his cousin Janet said, "or he would have a great alteration made."

"It is easy to make alterations," said he, "but it is not easy to make the poor people take advantage of them. They have such good health from the sea-air that they will not pay attention to ordinary cleanliness. But now that two or three of the young girls and children are ill, perhaps it is a good time to have something done."

Next morning, when he rose before it was daybreak, there was every promise of a fine day. The full moon was setting behind the western seas, lighting up the clouds there with a dusky yellow; in the east there was a wilder glare of steely blue high up over the intense blackness on the back of Ben-an-Sloich; and the morning was still, for he heard, suddenly piercing the silence, the whistle of a curlew, and that became more and more remote as the unseen bird winged its flight far over the sea. He lit the candles, and made the necessary preparations for his journey; for he had some message to leave at Kinloch, at the head of Loch Scridain, and he was going to ride round that way. By and by the morning light had increased so much that he blew out the candles.

No sooner had he done this than his eye caught sight of something outside that startled him. It seemed as though great clouds of golden-white, all ablaze in sunshine, rested on the dark bosom of the deep. Instantly he went to the window; and then he saw that these clouds were not clouds at all, but the islands around glittering in the "white wonder of the snow," and catching here and there the shafts of the early sunlight that now streamed through the valleys of Mull. The sudden marvel of it! There was Ulva, shining beautiful as in a sparkling bridal veil; and Gometra a paler blue-white in the shadow; and Colonsay and Erisgeir also a cold white; and Staffa pale gray; and then the sea that the gleaming islands rested on was a mirror of pale-green and rose-purple hues reflected from the morning sky. It was all dream-like, so still, and beautiful, and silent. But he now saw that that fine morning would not last. Behind the house clouds of a

suffused yellow began to blot out the sparkling peaks of Ben-an-Sloich. The colors of the plain of the sea were troubled with gusts of wind until they disappeared altogether. The sky in the north grew an ominous black, until the farther shores of Loch Tua were dazzling white against that bank of angry cloud. But to Buinessan he would go.

Janet Macleod was not much afraid of the weather at any time, but she said to him at breakfast, in a laughing way.

"And if you are lost in a snowdrift in Glen Finichen, Keith, what are we to do for you?"

"What are you to do for me?—why, Donald will make a fine Lament; and what more than that?"

"Cannot you send one of the Camerons with a message, Keith?" his mother said.

"Well, mother," said he, "I think I will go on to Fhionfort and cross over to Iona myself, if Mr. Mackinnon will go with me. For it is very bad the cottages are there, I know; and if I must write to the duke, it is better that I should have made the inquiries myself."

And, indeed, when Macleod set out on his stout young pony Jack, paying but little heed to the cold driftings of sleet that the sharp east wind was sending across, it seemed as though he were destined to perform several charitable deeds all on the one errand. For, firstly, about a mile from the house, he met Duncan the policeman, who was making his weekly round in the interests of morality and law and order, and who had to have his book signed by the heritor of Castle Dare as sure witness that his peregrinations had extended so far. And Duncan was not at all sorry to be saved that trudge of a mile in the face of those bitter blasts of sleet; and he was greatly obliged to Sir Keith Macleod for stopping his pony, and getting out his pencil with his benumbed fingers, and putting his initials to the sheet. And then, again, when he had got into Glen Finichen, he was talking to the pony and saying,—

"Well, Jack, I don't wonder you want to stop, for the way this sleet gets down one's throat is rather choking. Or are you afraid of the sheep loosening the rocks away up there, and sending two or three hundred-weight on our head?"

Then he happened to look up the steep sides of the great ravine, and there, quite brown against the snow, he saw a sheep that had toppled over some rock, and was now lying with her legs in the air. He jumped off his pony, and left Jack standing in the middle of the road. It was a stiff climb up that steep precipice, with the loose stones slippery with

the sleet and snow ; but at last he got a good grip of the sheep by the back of her neck, and hauled her out of the hole into which she had fallen, and put her, somewhat dazed but apparently unhurt, on her legs again. Then he half slid and half ran down the slope again, and got into the saddle.

But what was this now ? The sky in the east had grown quite black ; and suddenly this blackness began to fall as it were torn down by invisible hands. It came nearer and nearer, until it resembled the dishevelled hair of a woman. And then there was a rattle and roar of wind and snow and hail combined ; so that the pony was nearly thrown from its feet, and Macleod was so blinded that at first he knew not what to do. Then he saw some rocks ahead, and he urged the bewildered and staggering beast forward through the darkness of the storm. Night seemed to have returned. There was a flash of lightning overhead, and a crackle of thunder rolled down the valley, heard louder than all the howling of the hurricane across the mountain sides. And then, when they had reached this place of shelter, Macleod dismounted, and crept as close as he could into the lee of the rocks.

He was startled by a voice ; it was only that of old John Macintyre, the postman, who was glad enough to get into this place of refuge too.

"It's a bad day for you to be out this day, Sir Keith," said he, in the Gaelic, "and you have no cause to be out ; and why will you not go back to Castle Dare ?"

"Have you any letter for me, John ?" said he, eagerly.

Oh yes, there was a letter ; and the old man was astonished to see how quickly Sir Keith Macleod took that letter, and how anxiously he read it, as though the awfulness of the storm had no concern for him at all. And what was it all about, this wet sheet that he had to hold tight between his hands, or the gust that swept round the rocks would have whirled it up and away over the giant ramparts of the Bourg ? It was a very pretty letter, and rather merry ; for it was all about a fancy-dress ball which was to take place at Mr. Lemuel's house ; and all the people were to wear a Spanish costume of the time of Philip IV. ; and there were to be very grand doings indeed. And as Keith Macleod had nothing to do in the dull winter-time but devote himself to books, would he be so kind as to read up about that period, and advise her as to which historical character she ought to assume ?

Macleod burst out laughing, in a strange sort of way, and

put the wet letter in his pocket, and led Jack out into the road again.

"Sir Keith, Sir Keith!" cried the old man, "you will not go on now?" And as he spoke, another blast of snow tore across the glen, and there was a rumble of thunder among the hills.

"Why, John," Macleod called back again from the gray gloom of the whirling snow and sleet, "would you have me go home and read books too? Do you know what a fancy dress ball is, John? And do you know what they think of us in the South, John: that we have nothing to do here in winter-time—nothing to do here but read books?"

The old man heard him laughing to himself in that odd way, as he rode off and disappeared into the driving snow; and his heart was heavy within him, and his mind filled with strange forebodings. It was a dark and an awful glen, this great ravine that led down to the solitary shores of Loch Scridain.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OVER THE SEAS.

BUT no harm at all came of that reckless ride through the storm; and in a day or two's time Macleod had almost argued himself into the belief that it was but natural for a young girl to be fascinated by these new friends. And how could he protest against a fancy-dress ball, when he himself had gone to one on his brief visit to London? And it was a proof of her confidence in him that she wished to take his advice about her costume.

Then he turned to other matters; for, as the slow weeks went by, one eagerly disposed to look for the signs of the coming spring might occasionally detect a new freshness in the morning air, or even find a little bit of the whitlow-grass in flower among the moss of an old wall. And Major Stuart had come over to Dare once or twice; and had privately given Lady Macleod and her niece such enthusiastic accounts of Miss Gertrude White that the references to her forthcoming visit ceased to be formal and became friendly

and matter of course. It was rarely, however, that Keith Macleod mentioned her name. He did not seem to wish for any confidant. Perhaps her letters were enough.

But on one occasion Janet Macleod said to him, with a shy smile.

"I think you must be a very patient lover, Keith, to spend all the winter here. Another young man would have wished to go to London."

"And I would go to London, too!" he said suddenly, and then he stopped. He was somewhat embarrassed. "Well, I will tell you, Janet. I do not wish to see her any more as an actress, and she says it is better that I do not go to London; and—and, you know, she will soon cease to be an actress."

"But why not now," said Janet Macleod, with some wonder, "if she has such a great dislike for it?"

"That I do not know," said he, somewhat gloomily.

But he wrote to Gertrude White, and pressed the point once more, with great respect, it is true, but still with an earnestness of pleading that showed how near the matter lay to his heart. It was a letter that would have touched most women; and even Miss Gertrude White was pleased to see how anxiously interested he was in her.

"But you know, my dear Keith," she wrote back, "when people are going to take a great plunge into the sea, they are warned to wet their head first. And don't you think I should accustom myself to the change you have in store for me by degrees? In any case, my leaving the stage at the present moment could make no difference to us—you in the Highlands, I in London. And do you know, sir, that your request is particularly ill-timed; for, as it happens, I am about to enter into a new dramatic project of which I should probably never have heard but for you. Does that astonish you? Well, here is the story. It appears that you told the Duchess of Wexford that I would give her a performance for the new training-ship she is getting up; and, being challenged, could I break a promise made by you? And only fancy what these clever people have arranged, to flatter their own vanity in the name of charity. They have taken St. George's Hall, and the distinguished amateurs have chosen the play; and the play—don't laugh, dear Keith—is '*Romeo and Juliet*!' And I am to play *Juliet* to the *Romeo* of the Honorable Captain Brierley, who is a very good-looking man, but who is so solemn and stiff a *Romeo* that I know I shall

burst out laughing on the dreaded night. He is as nervous now at a morning rehearsal as if it were his *debut* at Drury Lane ; and he never even takes my hand without an air of apology, as if he were saying, ' Really, Miss White, you must pardon me ; I am compelled by my part to take your hand ; otherwise I would die rather than be guilty of such a liberty. ' And when he addresses me in the balcony-scene, he *will not* look at me ; he makes his protestations of love to the flies ; and when I make my fine speeches to him, he blushes if his eyes should by chance meet mine, just as if he had been guilty of some awful indiscretion. I know, dear Keith, you don't like to see me act, but you might come up for this occasion only. Friar Lawrence is the funniest thing I have seen for ages. The nurse, however, Lady Bletherin, is not at all bad. I hear there is to be a grand supper afterwards somewhere, and I have no doubt I shall be presented to a number of ladies who will speak for the first time to an actress and be possessed with a wild fear ; only, if they have daughters, I suppose they will keep the fluttering-hearted young things out of the way, lest I should suddenly break out into blue flame, and then disappear through the floor. I am quite convinced that Captain Brierley considers me a bold person because I look at him when I have to say,

" ' O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully ! ' "

Macleod crushed this letter together, and thrust it into his pocket. He strode out of the room, and called for Hamish.

" Send Donald down to the quay," said he, " and tell them to get the boat ready. And he will take down my gun too."

Old Hamish, noticing the expression of his master's eyes, went off quickly enough, and soon got hold of Donald, the piper-lad.

" Donald," said he, in the Gaelic, " you will run down to the quay as fast as your legs can carry you, and you will tell them to get the boat ready, and not to lose any time in getting the boat ready, and to have the seat dry, and let there be no talking when Sir Keith gets on board. And here is the gun too, and the bag ; and you will tell them to have no talking among themselves this day."

When Macleod got down to the small stone pier, the two men were in the boat. Johnny Wickes was standing at the door of the storehouse.

"Would you like to go for a sail, Johnny?" Macleod said abruptly, but there was no longer that dangerous light in his eyes.

"Oh yes, sir," said the boy, eagerly; for he had long ago lost his dread of the sea.

"Get in, then, and get up to the bow."

So Johnny Wickes went cautiously down the few slippery stone steps, half tumbled into the bottom of the great open boat, and then scrambled up to the bow.

"Where will you be for going, sir?" said one of the men when Macleod had jumped into the stern and taken the tiller.

"Anywhere—right out!" he answered, carelessly.

But it was all very well to say "right out!" when there was a stiff breeze blowing right in. Scarcely had the boat put her nose out beyond the pier, and while as yet there was but little way on her, when a big sea caught her, springing high over her bows and coming rattling down on her with a noise as of pistol-shots. The chief victim of this deluge was the luckless Johnny Wickes, who tumbled down into the bottom of the boat, vehemently blowing the salt-water out of his mouth, and rubbing his knuckles into his eyes. Macleod burst out laughing.

"What's the good of you as a lookout?" he cried. "Didn't you see the water coming?"

"Yes, sir," said Johnny, ruefully laughing, too. But he would not be beaten. He scrambled up again to his post, and clung there, despite the fierce wind and the clouds of spray.

"Keep her close up, sir," said the man who had the sheet of the huge lugsail in both his hands, as he cast a glance out at the darkening sea.

But this great boat, rude and rough and dirty as she appeared, was a splendid specimen of her class; and they know how to build such boats up about that part of the world. No matter with how staggering a plunge she went down into the yawning green gulf, the white foam hissing away from her sides; before the next wave, high, awful, threatening, had come down on her with a crash as of mountains falling, she had glided buoyantly upward, and the heavy blow only made her bows spring the higher, as though she would shake herself free, like a bird, from the wet. But it was a wild day to be out. So heavy and black was the sky in the west that the surface of the sea out to the horizon seemed to be a

moving mass of white foam, with only streaks of green and purple in it. The various islands changed every minute as the wild clouds whirled past. Already the great cliffs about Dare had grown distant and faint as seen through the spray; and here were the rocks of Colonsay, black as jet as they reappeared through the successive deluges of white foam; and far over there, a still gloomier mass against the gloomy sky told where the huge Atlantic breakers were rolling in their awful thunder into the Staffa caves.

"I would keep her away a bit," said the sailor next Macleod. He did not like the look of the heavy breakers that were crashing on to the Colonsay rocks.

Macleod, with his teeth set hard against the wind, was not thinking of the Colonsay rocks more than was necessary to give them a respectful berth.

"Were you ever in a theatre, Duncan?" he said, or rather bawled, to the brown-visaged and black-haired young fellow who had now got the sheet of the lugsail under his foot as well as in the firm grip of his hands.

"Oh yes, Sir Keith," said he, as he shook the salt-water away from his short beard. "It was at Greenock. I will be at the theatre, and more than three times or two times."

"How would you like to have a parcel of actors and actresses with us now?" he said, with a laugh.

"Deed, I would not like it at all," said Duncan, seriously; and he twisted the sheet of the sail twice round his right wrist, so that his relieved left hand could convey a bit of wet tobacco to his mouth. "The women they would chump apout, and then you do not know what will happen at all."

"A little bit away yet, sir!" cried out the other sailor, who was looking out to windward, with his head between the gunwale and the sail. "There is a bad rock off the point."

"Why, it is half a mile north of our course as we are now going!" Macleod said.

"Oh yes, half a mile!" the man said to himself; "but I do not like half miles, and half miles, and half miles on a day like this!"

And so they went plunging and staggering and bounding onward, with the roar of the water all around them, and the foam at her bows, as it sprung high into the air, showing quite white against the black sky ahead. The younger lad, Duncan, was clearly of opinion that his master was running too near the shores of Colonsay; but he would say no more, for he knew that Macleod had a better knowledge of

the currents and rocks of this wild coast than any man on the mainland of Mull. John Cameron, forward, kept his head down to the gunwale, his eyes looking far over that howling waste of sea ; Duncan, his younger brother, had his gaze fixed mostly on the brown breadth of the sail, hammered at by the gusts of wind ; while as for the boy at the bow, that enterprising youth had got a rope's end, and was endeavoring to strike at the crest of each huge wave as it came ploughing along in its resistless strength.

But at one moment the boat gave a heavier lurch than usual, and the succeeding wave struck her badly. In the great rush of water that then ran by her side, Macleod's startled eye seemed to catch a glimpse of something red—something blazing and burning red in the waste of green, and almost the same glance showed him there was no boy at the bow ! Instantly, with just one cry to arrest the attention of the men, he had slipped over the side of the boat just as an otter slips off a rock. The two men were bewildered but for a second. One sprang to the halyards, and down came the great lugsail ; the other got out one of the great oars, and the mighty blade of it fell into the bulk of the next wave as if he would with one sweep tear her head round. Like two mad men the men pulled ; and the wind was with them, and the tide also, but, nevertheless, when they caught sight, just for a moment, of some object behind them, that was a terrible way away. Yet there was no time, they thought, or seemed to think, to hoist the sail again, and the small dingy attached to the boat would have been swamped in a second ; and so there was nothing for it but the deadly struggle with those immense blades against the heavy resisting mass of the boat. John Cameron looked round again ; then, with an oath, he pulled his oar across the boat.

"Up with the sail, lad !" he shouted ; and again he sprang to the halyards.

The seconds, few as they were, that were necessary to this operation seemed ages ; but no sooner had the wind got a purchase on the breadth of the sail, than the boat flew through the water, for she was now running free.

"He has got him ! I can see the two !" shouted the elder Cameron.

And as for the younger ? At this mad speed the boat would be close to Macleod in another second or two ; but in that brief space of time the younger Cameron had flung his

clothes off, and stood there stark-naked in the cutting March wind.

"That is foolishness!" his brother cried in the Gaelic. "You will have to take an oar!"

"I will not take an oar!" the other cried, with both hands ready to let go the halyards. "And if it is foolishness, this is the foolishness of it: I will not let you or any man say that Sir Keith Macleod was in the water, and Duncan Cameron went home with a dry skin!"

And Duncan Cameron was as good as his word; for as the boat went plunging forward to the neighborhood in which they occasionally saw the head of Macleod appear on the side of a wave and then disappear again as soon as the wave broke, and as soon as the lugsail had been rattled down, he sprung clear from the side of the boat. For a second or two, John Cameron, left by himself in the boat, could not see any one of the three; but at last he saw the black head of his brother, and then some few yards beyond, just as a wave happened to roll by, he saw his master and the boy. The boat had almost enough way on her to carry her the length; he had but to pull at the huge oar to bring her head round a bit. And he pulled, madly and blindly, until he was startled by a cry close by. He sprang to the side of the boat. There was his brother drifting by, holding the boy with one arm. John Cameron rushed to the stern to fling a rope, but Duncan Cameron had been drifting by with a purpose; for as soon as he got clear of the bigger boat, he struck for the rope of the dingy, and got hold of that, and was safe. And here was the master, too, clinging to the side of the dingy so as to recover his breath, but not attempting to board the cockleshell in these plunging waters. There were tears running down John Cameron's rugged face as he drew the three up and over the side of the big boat.

"And if you wass drowned, Sir Keith, it wass not me would have carried the story to Castle Dare. I would just as soon have been drowned too."

"Have you any whiskey, John?" Macleod said, pushing the hair out of his eyes, and trying to get his mustache out of his mouth.

In ordinary circumstances John Cameron would have told a lie; but on this occasion he hurriedly bade the still undressed Duncan to take the tiller, and he went forward to a locker at the bows, which was usually kept for bait, and from thence he got a black bottle which was half full.

"Now, Johnny Wickes," Macleod said to the boy, who was quite blinded and bewildered, but otherwise apparently not much the worse, "swallow a mouthful of this, you young rascal; and if I catch you imitating a dolphin again, it is a rope's end you'll have, and not good Highland whiskey."

Johnny Wickes did not understand; but he swallowed the whiskey, and then he began to look about him a bit.

"Will I put my clothes round him, Sir Keith?" Duncan Cameron said.

"And go home that way to Dare?" Macleod said, with a loud laugh. "Get on your clothes, Duncan, lad, and get up the sail again; and we will see if there is a dram left for us in the bottle. John Cameron, confound you! where are you putting her head to?"

John Cameron, who had again taken the tiller, seemed as one demented. He was talking to himself rapidly in Gaelic, and his brows were frowning; and he did not seem to notice that he was putting the head of the boat, which had now some little way on her by reason of the wind and tide, though she had no sail up, a good deal too near the southernmost point of Colonsay.

Roused from this angry reverie, he shifted her course a bit; and then, when his brother had got his clothes on, he helped to hoist the sail, and again they flew onward and shoreward, along with the waves that seemed to be racing them; but all the same he kept grumbling and growling to himself in Gaelic. Meanwhile Macleod had got a huge tarpaulin overcoat and wrapped Johnny Wickes in it, and put him in the bottom of the boat.

"You will soon be warm enough in that, Master Wickes," said he; "the chances are you will come out boiled red, like a lobster. And I would strongly advise you, if we can slip into the house and get dry clothes on, not to say a word of your escapade to Hamish."

"Ay, Sir Keith," said John Cameron, eagerly, in his native tongue, "that is what I will be saying to myself. If the story is told—and Hamish will hear that you will nearly drown yourself—what is it he will not do to that boy? It is for killing him he will be."

"Not as bad as that, John," Macleod said, good-naturedly. "Come, there is a glass for each of us; and you may give me the tiller now."

"I will take no whiskey, Sir Keith, with thanks to you," said John Cameron; "I was not in the water."

"There is plenty for all, man !"

"I was not in the water."

"I tell you there is plenty for all of us !"

"There is the more for you, Sir Keith," said he, stubbornly.

And then, as great good luck would have it, it was found, when they got ashore, that Hamish had gone away as far as Salen on business of some sort or other ; and the story told by the two Camerons was that Johnny Wickes, whose clothes were sent into the kitchen to be dried, and who was himself put to bed, had fallen into the water down by the quay ; and nothing at all was said about Keith Macleod having had to leap into the sea off the coast of Colonsay. Macleod got into Castle Dare by a back way, and changed his clothes in his own room. Then he went away upstairs to the small chamber in which Johnny Wickes lay in bed.

"You have had the soup, then ? You look pretty comfortable."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, whose face was now flushed red with the reaction after the cold. "I beg your pardon, sir."

"For tumbling into the water ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, look here, Master Wickes : you chose a good time. If I had had trousers on, and waterproof leggings over them, do you know where you would be at the present moment ? You would be having an interesting conversation with a number of lobsters at the bottom of the sea off the Colonsay shores. And so you thought because I had my kilt on, that I could fish you out of the water ?"

"No, sir," said Johnny Wickes. "I beg your pardon, sir."

"Well, you will remember that it was owing to the Highland kilt that you were picked out of the water, and that it was Highland whiskey put life into your blood again ; you will remember that well. And if any strange lady should come here from England and ask you how you like the Highlands, you will not forget ?"

"No, sir."

"And you can have Oscar up here in the room with you, if you like, until they let you out of bed again ; or you can have Donald to play the pipes to you until dinner-time."

Master Wickes chose the less heroic remedy ; but, indeed, the companionship of Oscar was not needed ; for Janet Macleod—who might just as well have tried to keep her heart

from beating as to keep herself away from any one who was ill or supposed to be ill—herself came up to this little room, and was very attentive to Master Wickes, not because he was suffering very much from the effects of his ducking, but because he was a child, and alone, and a stranger. And to her Johnny Wickes told the whole story, despite the warnings he had received that, if Hamish came to learn of the peril in which Macleod had been placed by the incaution of the English lad, the latter would have had a bad time of it at Castle Dare. Then Janet hastened away again, and, finding her cousin's bedroom empty, entered; and there discovered that he had, with customary recklessness, hung up his wet clothes in his wardrobe. She had them at once conveyed away to the lower regions, and she went, with earnest remonstrances, to her cousin, and would have him drink some hot whiskey and water; and when Hamish arrived, went straight to him too, and told him the story in such a way that he said,—

“Ay, ay, it wass the poor little lad! And he will mek a good sailor yet. And it was not much dancher for him when Sir Keith wass in the boat; for there is no one in the whole of the islands will sweem in the water as he can sweem; and it is like a fish in the water that he is.”

That was about the only incident of note, and little was made of it, that disturbed the monotony of life at Castle Dare at this time. But by and by, as the days passed, and as eager eyes looked abroad, signs showed that the beautiful summer-time was drawing near. The deep blue came into the skies and the seas again; the yellow mornings broke earlier. Far into the evening they could still make out the Dutchman's Cap, and Lunga, and the low-lying Coll and Tiree, amidst the glow at the horizon after the blood-red sunset had gone down. The white stars of the saxifrage appeared in the woods; the white daisies were in the grass. As you walked along the lower slopes of Ben-an-Sloich, the grouse that rose were in pairs. What a fresh green this was that shimmered over the young larches! He sent her a basket of the first trout he caught in the loch.

The wonderful glad time came nearer and nearer. And every clear and beautiful day that shone over the white sands of Iona and the green shores of Ulva, with the blue seas all breaking joyfully along the rocks, was but a day thrown away that should have been reserved for her. And whether she came by the *Dunara* from Greenock, or by the *Pioneer* from

Oban, would they hang the vessel in white roses in her honor, and have velvet carpetings on the gangways for the dainty small feet to tread on? and would the bountiful heavens grant but one shining blue day for her first glimpse of the far and lonely Castle Dare? Janet, the kind-hearted, was busy from morning till night; she herself would place the scant flowers that could be got in the guests' rooms. The steward of the *Pioneer* had undertaken to bring any number of things from Oban; Donald, the piper-lad, had a brand-new suit of tartan, and was determined that, short of the very cracking of his lungs, the English lady would have a good salute played for her that day. The *Umpire*, all smartened up now, had been put in a safe anchorage in Loch-na-Keal; the men wore their new jerseys; the long gig, painted white, with a band of gold, was brought along to Dare, so that it might, if the weather were favorable, go out to bring the Fair Stranger to her Highland home. And then the heart of her lover cried, "*O winds and seas, if only for one day, be gentle now! so that her first thoughts of us shall be all of peace and loveliness, and of a glad welcome, and the delight of clear summer days!*"

CHAPTER XXXII.

HAMISH.

AND now—look! The sky is as blue as the heart of a sapphire, and the sea would be as blue too, only for the glad white of the rippling waves. And the wind is as soft as the winnowing of a sea-gull's wing; and green, green, are the laughing shores of Ulva. The bride is coming. All around the coast the people are on the alert—Donald in his new finery; Hamish half frantic with excitement; the crew of the *Umpire* down at the quay; and the scarlet flag fluttering from the top of the white pole. And behold!—as the cry goes along that the steamer is in sight, what is this strange thing? She comes clear out from the Sound of Iona; but who has ever seen before that long line running from her stem to her top-mast and down again to her stern?

"Oh, Keith!" Janet Macleod cried, with sudden tears

starting to her eyes, "do you know what Captain Macallum has done for you? The steamer has got all her flags out!"

Macleod flushed red.

"Well, Janet," said he, "I wrote to Captain Macallum, and I asked him to be so good as to pay them some little attention; but who was to know that he would do that?"

"And a very proper thing, too," said Major Stuart, who was standing hard by. "A very pretty compliment to strangers; and you know you have not many visitors coming to Castle Dare."

The major spoke in a matter of fact way. Why should not the steamer show her bunting in honor of Macleod's guests! But all the same the gallant soldier, as he stood and watched the steamer coming along, became a little bit excited too; and he whistled to himself, and tapped his toe on the ground. It was a fine air he was whistling. It was all about breast-knots!

"Into the boat with you now, lads!" Macleod called out; and first of all to go down to the steps was Donald; and the silver and cairngorms on his pipes were burnished so that they shone like diamonds in the sunlight; and he wore his cap so far on one side that nobody could understand how it did not fall off. Macleod was alone in the stern. Away the white boat went through the blue waves.

"Put your strength into it now," said he, in the Gaelic, "and show them how the Mull lads can row!"

And then again—

"Steady now! Well rowed all!"

And here are all the people crowding to one side of the steamer to see the strangers off; and the captain is on the bridge; and Sandy is at the open gangway: and, at the top of the iron steps, there is only one Macleod sees—all in white and blue—and he has caught her eyes—at last! at last!

He seized the rope and sprang up the iron ladder.

"Welcome to you, sweetheart!" said he, in a low voice, and his trembling hand grasped hers.

"How do you, Keith?" said she. "Must we go down these steps?"

He had no time to wonder over the coldness—the petulance almost—of her manner: for he had to get both father and daughter safely conducted into the stern of the boat; and their luggage had to be got in; and he had to say a word or two to the steward; and finally he had to hand down

some loaves of bread to the man next him, who placed them in the bottom of the boat.

"The commissariat arrangements are primitive," said Mr. White, in an undertone, to his daughter; but she made no answer to his words or his smile. But, indeed, even if Macleod had overheard, he would have taken no shame to himself that he had secured a supply of white bread for his guests. Those who had gone yachting with Macleod—Major Stuart, for example, or Norman Ogilvie—had soon learned not to despise their host's highly practical acquaintance with tinned meats, pickles, condensed milk, and suchlike things. Who was it had proposed to erect a monument to him for his discovery of the effect of introducing a leaf of lettuce steeped in vinegar between the folds of a sandwich?

Then he jumped down into the boat again; and the great steamer steamed away; and the men struck their oars into the water.

"We will soon take you ashore now," said he, with a glad light on his face; but so excited was he that he could scarcely get the tiller-ropes right; and certainly he knew not what he was saying. And as for her—why was she so silent after the long separation? Had she no word at all for the lover who had so hungered for her coming?

And then Donald, perched high at the bow, broke away into his wild welcome of her; and there was a sound now louder than the calling of the sea-birds and the rushing of the seas. And if the English lady knew that this proud and shrill strain had been composed in honor of her, would it not bring some color of pleasure to the pale face? So thought Donald at least; and he had his eyes fixed on her as he played as he had never played before that day. And if she did not know the cunning modulations and the clever fingering, Macleod knew them, and the men knew them; and after they got ashore they would say to him,—

"Donald, that was a good pibroch you played for the English lady."

But what was the English lady's thanks? Donald had not played over sixty seconds when she turned to Macleod and said,—

"Keith I wish you would stop him. I have a headache."

And so Macleod called out at once, in the lad's native tongue. But Donald could not believe this thing, though he had seen the strange lady turn to Sir Keith. And he would

have continued had not one of the men turned to him and said,—

“Donald, do you not hear? Put down the pipes.”

For an instant the lad looked dumbfounded; then he slowly took down the pipes from his shoulder and put them beside him, and then he turned his face to the bow, so that no one should see the tears of wounded pride that had sprung to his eyes. And Donald said no word to any one till they got ashore; and he went away by himself to Castle Dare, with his head bent down and his pipes under his arm; and when he was met at the door by Hamish, who angrily demanded why he was not down at the quay with his pipes, he only said,—

“There is no need of me or my pipes any more at Dare; and it is somewhere else that I will now go with my pipes.”

But meanwhile Macleod was greatly concerned to find his sweetheart so cold and distant; and it was all in vain that he pointed out to her the beauties of this summer day—that he showed her the various islands he had often talked about, and called her attention to the skarts sitting on the Erisgeir rocks, and asked her—seeing that she sometimes painted a little in water-color—whether she noticed the peculiar, clear, intense, and luminous blue of the shadows in the great cliffs which they were approaching. Surely no day could have been more auspicious for her coming to Dare?

“The sea did not make you ill?” he said.

“Oh no,” she answered; and that was true enough, though it had produced in her agonizing fears of becoming ill which had somewhat ruffled her temper. And besides, she had a headache. And then she had a nervous fear of small boats.

“It is a very small boat to be out in the open sea,” she remarked, looking at the long and shapely gig that was cleaving the summer waves.

“Not on a day like this, surely,” said he, laughing. “But we will make a good sailor of you before you leave Dare, and you will think yourself safer in a boat like this than in a big steamer. Do you know that the steamer you came in, big as it is, draws only five feet of water?”

If he had told her that the steamer drew five tons of coal she could just as well have understood him. Indeed, she was not paying much attention to him. She had an eye for the biggest of the waves that were running by the side of the white boat.

But she plucked up her spirits somewhat on getting ashore ; and she made the prettiest of little courtesies to Lady Macleod ; and she shook hands with Major Stuart, and gave him a charming smile ; and she shook hands with Janet, too, whom she regarded with a quick scrutiny. So this was the cousin that Keith Macleod was continually praising ?

"Miss White has a headache, mother," Macleod said, eager to account beforehand for any possible constraint in her manner. "Shall we send for the pony ?"

"Oh no," Miss White said, looking up at the bare walls of Dare. "I shall be very glad to have a short walk now—unless you, papa, would like to ride ?"

"Certainly not—certainly not," said Mr. White, who had been making a series of formal remarks to Lady Macleod about his impressions of the scenery of Scotland.

"We will get you a cup of tea," said Janet Macleod, gently, to the new-comer, "and you will lie down for a little time, and I hope the sound of the waterfall will not disturb you. It is a long way you have come : and you will be very tired, I am sure."

"Yes, it is a pretty long way," she said ; but she wished this over-friendly woman would not treat her as if she were a spoiled child. And no doubt they thought, because she was English, she could not walk up to the farther end of that fir-wood ?

So they all set out for Castle Dare ; and Macleod was now walking—as many a time he had dreamed of his walking—with his beautiful sweetheart ; and there were the very ferns that he thought she would admire ; and here the very point in the firwood where he would stop her and ask her to look out on the blue sea, with Inch Kenneth, and Ulva, and Staffa, all lying in the sunlight, and the razor-fish of land—Coll and Tiree—at the horizon. But instead of being proud and glad, he was almost afraid. He was so anxious that everything should please her that he dared scarce bid her look at anything. He had himself superintended the mending of the steep path ; but even now the recent rains had left some puddles. Would she not consider the moist, warm odors of this larch-wood as too oppressive ?

"What is that ?" she said, suddenly.

There was a sound far below them of the striking of oars in the water, and another sound of one or two men monotonously chanting a rude sort of chorus.

"They are taking the gig on to the yacht," he said.

"But what are they singing?"

"Oh, that is *Fhir a bhata*," said he; "it is the common boat-song. It means, *Good-by to you, boatman, a hundred times, wherever you may be going.*"

"It is very striking, very effective, to hear singing and not see the people," she said. "It is the very prettiest introduction to a scene; I wonder it is not oftener used. Do you think they could write me down the words and music of that song?"

"Oh no, I think not," said he, with a nervous laugh. "But you will find something like it, no doubt, in your book."

So they passed on through the plantation; and at last they came to an open glade; and here was a deep chasm spanned by a curious old bridge of stone almost hidden by ivy; and there was a brawling stream dashing down over the rocks and flinging spray all over the briers, and queen of the meadow, and foxgloves on either bank.

"That is very pretty," said she; and then he was eager to tell her that this little glen was even more beautiful when the rowan-trees showed their rich clusters of scarlet berries.

"Those bushes there, you mean," said she. "The mountain-ash?"

"Yes."

"Ah," she said, "I never see those scarlet berries without wishing I was a dark woman. If my hair were black, I would wear nothing else in it."

By this time they had climbed well up the cliff; and presently they came on the open plateau on which stood Castle Dare, with its gaunt walls and its rambling courtyards, and its stretch of damp lawn with a few fuchsia-bushes and orange-lilies, that did not give a very ornamental look to the place.

"We have had heavy rains of late," he said, hastily; he hoped the house and its surroundings did not look too dismal.

And when they went inside and passed through the sombre dining-hall, with its huge fireplace, and its dark weapons, and its few portraits dimly visible in the dusk, he said,—

"It is very gloomy in the daytime; but it is more cheerful at night."

And when they reached the small drawing-room he was anxious to draw her attention away from the antiquated furniture and the nondescript decoration by taking her to the window and showing her the great breadth of the summer sea, with the far islands, and the brown-sailed boat of

the Gometra men coming back from Staffa. But presently in came Janet, and would take the fair stranger away to her room ; and was as attentive to her as if the one were a great princess, and the other a meek serving-woman. And by and by Macleod, having seen his other guest provided for, went into the library and shut himself in, and sat down, in a sort of stupor. He could almost have imagined that the whole business of the morning was a dream ; so strange did it seem to him that Gertrude White should be living and **breathing under the same roof with himself.**

Nature herself seemed to have conspired with Macleod to welcome and charm this fair guest. He had often spoken to her of the sunsets that shone over the Western seas ; and he had wondered whether, during her stay in the North, she would see some strange sight that would remain forever a blaze of color in her memory. And now on this very first evening there was a spectacle seen from the high windows of Dare that filled her with astonishment, and caused her to send quickly for her father, who was burrowing among the old armor. The sun had just gone down. The western sky was of the color of a soda-water bottle become glorified ; and in this vast breadth of shining clear green lay one long island of cloud—a pure scarlet. Then the sky overhead and the sea far below them were both of a soft roseate purple ; and Fladda and Staffa and Lunga, out at the horizon, were almost black against that flood of green light. When he asked her if she had brought her water-colors with her, smiled. She was not likely to attempt to put anything like that down on paper.

Then they adjourned to the big hall, which was now lit up with candles ; and Major Stuart had remained to dinner : and the gallant soldier, glad to have a merry evening away from his sighing wife, did his best to promote the cheerfulness of the party. Moreover, Miss White had got rid of her headache, and showed a greater brightness of face ; so that both the old lady at the head of the table and her niece Janet had to confess to themselves that this English girl who was like to tear Keith Macleod away from them was very pretty, and had an amiable look, and was soft and fine and delicate in her manners and speech. The charming simplicity of her costume, too : had anybody ever seen a dress more beautiful with less pretence of attracting notice ? Her **very hands**—they seemed objects fitted to be placed on a cushion of blue velvet under a glass shade, so white and

small and perfectly formed were they. That was what the kindly-hearted Janet thought. She did not ask herself how these hands would answer if called upon to help—amidst the grime and smoke of a shepherd's hut—the shepherd's wife to patch together a pair of homespun trousers for the sailor son coming back from the sea.

"And now," said Keith Macleod to his fair neighbor, when Hamish had put the claret and the whiskey on the table, "since your head is well now, would you like to hear the pipes? It is an old custom of the house. My mother would think it strange to have it omitted," he added, in a lower voice.

"Oh, if it is a custom of the house," she said, coldly—for she thought it was inconsiderate of him to risk bringing back her headache—"I have no objection whatever."

And so he turned to Hamish and said something in the Gaelic. Hamish replied in English, and loud enough for Miss White to hear.

"It is no pibroch there will be this night, for Donald is away."

"Away?"

"Ay, just that. When he wass come back from the boat, he will say to me, 'Hamish, it is no more of me or my pipes they want at Dare, and I am going away; and they can get some one else to play the pipes.' And I wass saying to him then, 'Donald, do not be a foolish lad; and if the English lady will not want the pibroch you made for her, perhaps at another time she will want it.' And now, Sir Keith, it is Maggie MacFarlane; she wass coming up from Loch-na-Keal this afternoon, and who was it she will meet but our Donald, and he wass saying to her, 'It is to Tobermory now that I am going, Maggie; and I will try to get a ship there; for it is no more of me or my pipes they will want at Dare.'"

This was Hamish's story; and the keen hawk-like eye of him was fixed on the English lady's face all the time he spoke in his struggling and halting fashion.

"Confound the young rascal!" Macleod said, with his face grown red. "I suppose I shall have to send a messenger to Tobermory and apologize to him for interrupting him to-day." And then he turned to Miss White. "They are like a set of children," he said, "with their pride and petulance."

This is all that needs be said about the manner of Miss White's coming to Dare, besides these two circumstances:

First of all, whether it was that Macleod was too flurried, and Janet too busy, and Lady Macleod too indifferent to attend to such trifles, the fact remains that no one, on Miss White's entering the house, had thought of presenting her with a piece of white heather, which, as every one knows, gives good health and good fortune and a long life to your friend. Again, Hamish seemed to have acquired a serious prejudice against her from the very outset. That night, when Castle Dare was asleep, and the old dame Christina and her husband were seated by themselves in the servants' room, and Hamish was having his last pipe, and both were talking over the great events of the day, Christina said, in her native tongue,

"And what do you think now of the English lady, Hamish?"

Hamish answered with an old and sinister saying:

"A fool would he be that would burn his harp to warm her."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GRAVE OF MACLEOD OF MACLEOD.

THE monotonous sound of the waterfall, so far from disturbing the new guest of Castle Dare, only soothed her to rest; and after the various fatigues, if not the emotions, of the day, she slept well. But in the very midst of the night she was startled by some loud commotion that seemed to prevail both within and without the house; and when she was fully awakened it appeared to her that the whole earth was being shaken to pieces in the storm. The wind howled in the chimneys; the rain dashed on the window-panes with a rattle as of musketry; far below she could hear the awful booming of the Atlantic breakers. The gusts that drove against the high house seemed ready to tear it from its foothold of rock and whirl it inland; or was it the sea itself that was rising in its thunderous power to sweep away this bauble from the face of the mighty cliffs? And then the wild and desolate morning that followed! Through the bewilderment of the running water on the panes she looked abroad

and there was a general hurry of preparation. The desolation of the day, he eagerly thought, would be forgotten in the romance of this night excursion. And surely she would be charmed by the beauty of the starlit sky, and the loneliness of the voyage, and their wandering over the ruins in the solemn moonlight?

Thick boots and waterproofs—these were his peremptory instructions. And then he led the way down the slippery path, and he had a tight hold of her arm; and if he talked to her in a low voice so that none should overhear, it is the way of lovers under the silence of the stars. They reached the pier, and the wet stone steps; and here, despite the stars, it was so dark that perforce she had to permit him to lift her off the lowest step and place her in security in what seemed to her a great hole of some kind or other. She knew, however, that she was in a boat, for there was a swaying hither and thither even in this sheltered corner. She saw other figures arrive—black between her and the sky—and she heard her father's voice above. Then he, too, got into the boat; the two men forward hauled up the huge lugsail; and presently there was a rippling line of sparkling white stars on each side of the boat, burning for a second or two on the surface of the black water.

"I don't know who is responsible for this madness," Mr. White said—and the voice from inside the great waterproof coat sounded as if it meant to be jocular—"but really, Gerty, to be on the open Atlantic in the middle of the night, in an open boat—"

"My dear sir," Macleod said, laughing, "you are as safe as if you were in bed. But I am responsible in the meantime, for I have the tiller. Oh, we shall be over in plenty of time to be clear of the banks."

"What did you say?"

"Well," Macleod admitted, "there are some banks, you know, in the Sound of Iona; and on a dark night they are a little awkward when the tide is low; but I am not going to frighten you—"

"I hope we shall have nothing much worse than this," said Mr. White, seriously.

For, indeed, the sea, after the squally morning, was running pretty high; and occasionally a cloud of spray came rattling over the bows, causing Macleod's guests to pull their waterproofs still more tightly round their necks. But what mattered the creaking of the cordage, and the plunging of

the boat, and the rushing of the seas, so long as that beautiful clear sky shone overhead?

"Gertrude," said he, in a low voice, "do you see the phosphorous-stars on the waves? I never saw them burn more brightly."

"They are very beautiful," said she. "When do we get to land, Keith?"

"Oh, pretty soon," said he. "You are not anxious to get to land?"

"It is stormier than I expected."

"Oh, this is nothing," said he. "I thought you would enjoy it."

However, that summer night's sail was like to prove a tougher business than Keith Macleod had bargained for. They had been out scarcely twenty minutes when Miss White heard the man at the bow call out something, which she could not understand, to Macleod. She saw him crane his neck forward, as if looking ahead; and she herself, looking in that direction, could perceive that from the horizon almost to the zenith the stars had become invisible.

"It may be a little bit squally," he said to her, "but we shall soon be under the lee of Iona. Perhaps you had better hold on to something."

The advice was not ill-timed; for almost as he spoke the first gust of the squall struck the boat, and there was a sound as if everything had been torn asunder and sent overboard. Then, as she righted just in time to meet the crash of the next wave, it seemed as though the world had grown perfectly black around them. The terrified woman seated there could no longer make out Macleod's figure; it was impossible to speak amidst this roar; it almost seemed to her that she was alone with those howling winds and heaving waves—at night on the open sea. The wind rose, and the sea too; she heard the men call out and Macleod answer; and all the time the boat was creaking and groaning as she was flung high on the mighty waves only to go staggering down into the awful troughs behind.

"Oh, Keith!" she cried—and involuntarily she seized his arm—"are we in danger?"

He could not hear what she said; but he understood the mute appeal. Quickly disengaging his arm—for it was the arm that was working the tiller—he called to her,—

"We are all right. If you are afraid, get to the bottom of the boat."

But unhappily she did not hear this ; for, as he called her, a heavy sea struck the bows, sprung high in the air, and then fell over them in a deluge which nearly choked her. She understood, though, his throwing away her hand. It was the triumph of brute selfishness in the moment of danger. They were drowning, and he would not let her come near him ! And so she shrieked aloud for her father.

Hearing those shrieks, Macleod called to one of the two men, who came stumbling along in the dark and got hold of the tiller. There was a slight lull in the storm, and he caught her two hands and held her.

"Gertrude, what is the matter? You are perfectly safe, and so is your father. For Heaven's sake, keep still ! if you get up, you will be knocked overboard !"

"Where is papa?" she cried.

"I am here—I am all right, Gerty!" was the answer—which came from the bottom of the boat, into which Mr. White had very prudently slipped.

And then, as they got under the lee of the island, they found themselves in smoother water, though from time to time squalls came over and threatened to flatten the great lugsail right on to the waves.

"Come now, Gertrude," said Macleod, "we shall be ashore in a few minutes, and you are not frightened of a squall?"

He had his arm round her, and he held her tight ; but she did not answer. At last she saw a light—a small, glimmering orange thing that quivered apparently a hundred miles off.

"See!" he said. "We are close by. And it may clear up to-night, after all."

Then he shouted to one of the men :

"Sandy, we will not try the quay the night : we will go into the Martyr's Bay."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

It was about a quarter of an hour after that—almost benumbed with fear—she discovered that the boat was in smooth water ; and then there was a loud clatter of the sail coming down ; and she heard the two sailors calling to each other, and one of them seemed to have got overboard. There was absolutely nothing visible—not even a distant light ; but it was raining heavily. Then she knew that Macleod had moved away from her ; and she thought she heard a splash in the water ; and then a voice beside her said.—

"Gertrude, will you not get up? You must let me carry you ashore."

And she found herself in his arms—carried as lightly as though she had been a young lamb or a fawn from the hills; but she knew from the slow way of his walking that he was going through the sea. Then he set her on the shore.

"Take my hand," said he.

"But where is papa?"

"Just behind us," said he, "on Sandy's shoulders. Sandy will bring him along. Come, darling!"

"But where are we going?"

"There is a little inn near the Cathedral. And perhaps it will clear up to-night; and we will have a fine sail back again to Dare."

She shuddered. Not for ten thousand worlds would she pass through once more that seething pit of howling sounds and raging seas.

He held her arm firmly; and she stumbled along through the darkness, not knowing whether she was walking through sea-weed, or pools of water, or wet corn. And at last they came to a door; and the door was opened; and there was a blaze of orange light; and they entered—all dripping and unrecognizable—the warm, snug little place, to the astonishment of a handsome young lady who proved to be their hostess.

"Dear me, Sir Keith," said she at length, "is it you indeed! And you will not be going back to Dare to-night?"

In fact, when Mr. White arrived, it was soon made evident that going back to Dare that night was out of the question; for somehow the old gentleman, despite his waterproofs, had managed to get soaked through; and he was determined to go to bed at once, so as to have his clothes dried. And so the hospitalities of the little inn were requisitioned to the utmost; and as there was no whiskey to be had, they had to content themselves with hot tea; and then they all retired to rest for the night, convinced that the moonlight visitation of the ruins had to be postponed.

But next day—such are the rapid changes in the Highlands—broke blue and fair and shining; and Miss Gertrude White was amazed to find that the awful Sound she had come along on the previous night was now brilliant in the most beautiful colors—for the tide was low, and the yellow sandbanks were shining through the blue waters of the sea. And would she not, seeing that the boat was lying down at the quay now, sail round the island, and see the splendid sight

of the Atlantic breaking on the wild coast on the western side? She hesitated; and then, when it was suggested that she might walk across the island, she eagerly accepted that alternative. They set out, on this hot, bright, beautiful day.

But where he, eager to please her and show the beauties of the Highlands, saw lovely white sands, and smiling plains of verdure, and far views of the sunny sea, she only saw loneliness, and desolation, and a constant threatening of death from the fierce Atlantic. Could anything have been more beautiful, he said to himself, than this magnificent scene that lay all around her when they reached a far point on the western shore?—in face of them the wildly rushing seas, coming thundering on to the rocks, and springing so high into the air that the snow-white foam showed black against the glare of the sky; the nearer islands gleaming with a touch of brown on their sunward side; the Dutchman's Cap, with its long brim and conical centre, and Lunga, also like a cap, but with a shorter brim and a high peak in front, becoming a trifle blue; then Coll and Tiree lying like a pale stripe on the horizon; while far away in the north the mountains of Rum and Skye were faint and spectral in the haze of the sunlight. Then the wild coast around them; with its splendid masses of granite; and its spare grass a brown-green in the warm sun; and its bays of silver sand; and its sea-birds whiter than the white clouds that came sailing over the blue. She recognized only the awfulness and the loneliness of that wild shore; with its suggestions of crashing storms in the night-time, and the cries of drowning men dashed helplessly on the cruel rocks. She was very silent all the way back, though he told her stories of the fairies that used to inhabit those sandy and grassy plains.

And could anything have been more magical than the beauty of that evening, after the storm had altogether died away? The red sunset sank behind the dark olive-green of the hills; a pale, clear twilight took its place, and shone over those mystic ruins that were the object of many a thought and many a pilgrimage in the far past and forgotten years; and then the stars began to glimmer as the distant shores and the sea grew dark; and then, still later on, a wonderful radiance rose behind the low hills of Mull, and across the waters of the Sound came a belt of quivering light as the white moon sailed slowly up into the sky. Would they venture out now into the silence? There was an odor of new-mown hay in the night air. Far away they could hear the

murmuring of the waves around the rocks. They did not speak a word as they walked along to those solemn ruins overlooking the sea, that were now a mass of mysterious shadow, except where the eastern walls and the tower were touched by the silvery light that had just come into the heavens.

And in silence they entered the still churchyard, too, and passed the graves. The buildings seemed to rise above them in a darkened majesty; before them was a portal through which a glimpse of the moonlight sky was visible. Would they enter then?

"I am almost afraid," she said, in a low voice, to her companion, and the hand on his arm trembled.

But no sooner had she spoken than there was a sudden sound in the night that caused her heart to jump. All over them and around them, as it seemed, there was a wild uproar of wings; and the clear sky above them was darkened by a cloud of objects wheeling this way and that, until at length they swept by overhead as if blown by a whirlwind, and crossed the clear moonlight in a dense body. She had quickly clung to him in her fear.

"It is only the jackdaws—there are hundreds of them," he said to her; but even his voice sounded strange in this hollow building.

For they had now entered by the open doorway; and all around them were the tall and crumbling pillars, and the arched windows, and ruined walls, here and there catching the sharp light of the moonlight, here and there showing soft and gray with a reflected light, with spaces of black shadow which led to unknown recesses. And always overhead the clear sky with its pale stars; and always, far away, the melancholy sound of the sea.

"Do you know where you are standing now?" said he, almost sadly. "You are standing on the grave of Macleod of Macleod."

She started aside with a slight exclamation.

"I do not think they bury any one in here now," said he, gently. And then he added, "Do you know that I have chosen the place for my grave? It is away out at one of the Treshnish islands; it is a bay looking to the west; there is no one living on that island. It is only a fancy of mine—to rest for ever and ever with no sound around you but the sea and the winds—no step coming near you, and no voice but the waves."

"Oh Keith, you should not say such things : you frighten me !" she said, in a trembling voice.

Another voice broke in upon them, harsh and pragmatical.

"Do you know, Sir Keith," said Mr. White, briskly, "that the moonlight is clear enough to let you make out this plan ? But I can't get the building to correspond. This is the chancel, I believe ; but where are the cloisters ?"

"I will show you," Macleod said ; and he led his companion through the silent and solemn place, her father following. In the darkness they passed through an archway, and were about to step out on to a piece of grass, when suddenly Miss White uttered a wild scream of terror and sank helplessly to the ground. She had slipped from his arm, but in an instant he had caught her again and had raised her on his bended knee, and was calling to her with kindly words.

"Gertrude, Gertrude !" he said. "What is the matter ? Won't you speak to me ?"

And just as she was pulling herself together the innocent cause of this commotion was discovered. It was a black lamb that had come up in the most friendly manner and had rubbed its head against her hand to attract her notice.

"Gertrude, see ! it is only a lamb ! It comes up to me every time I visit the ruins ; look !"

And, indeed, she was mightily ashamed of herself ; and pretended to be vastly interested in the ruins ; and was quite charmed with the view of the Sound in the moonlight, with the low hills beyond, now grown quite black ; but all the same she was very silent as they walked back to the inn. And she was pale and thoughtful, too, while they were having their frugal supper of bread and milk ; and very soon, pleading fatigue, she retired. But all the same, when Mr. White went upstairs, some time after, he had been but a short while in his room when he heard a tapping at the door. He said "Come in," and his daughter entered. He was surprised by the curious look of her face—a sort of piteous look, as of one ill at ease, and yet ashamed to speak.

"What is it, child ?" said he.

She regarded him for a second with that piteous look ; and then tears slowly gathered in her eyes.

"Papa," said she, in a sort of half-hysterical way, "I want you to take me away from here. It frightens me. I don't know what it is. He was talking to me about graves——"

And here she burst out crying, and sobbed bitterly.

"Oh, nonsense, child!" her father said. "Your nervous system must have been shaken last night by ~~that storm~~. I have seen a strange look upon your face all day. It was certainly a mistake our coming here; you are not fitted for this savage life."

She grew more composed. She sat down for a few minutes; and her father, taking out a small flask which had been filled from a bottle of brandy sent over during the day from Castle Dare, poured out a little of the spirits, added some water, and made her drink the dose as a sleeping draught."

"Ah well, you know, pappy," said she, as she rose to leave, and she bestowed a very pretty smile on him, "it is all in the way of experience, isn't it? and an artist should experience everything. But there is just a little too much about graves and ghosts in these parts for me. And I suppose we shall go to-morrow to see some cave or other where two or three hundred men, women, and children were murdered."

"I hope in going back we shall not be as near our own grave as we were last night," her father observed.

"And Keith Macleod laughs at it," she said, "and says it was unfortunate we got a wetting!"

And so she went to bed; and the sea-air had dealt well with her; and she had no dreams at all of shipwrecks, or of black familiars in moonlit shrines. Why should her sleep be disturbed because that night she had put her foot on the grave of the chief of the Macleods?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE UMPIRE

NEXT morning, with all this wonderful world of sea and islands shining in the early sunlight, Mr. White and his daughter were down by the shore, walking along the white sands, and chatting idly as they went. From time to time they looked across the fair summer seas to the distant cliffs of Bourg; and each time they looked a certain small white speck seemed coming nearer. That was the *Umpire*; and Keith Macleod was on board of her. He had started at an unknown hour of the night to bring the yacht over from her

anchorage. He would not have his beautiful Fionaghal, who had come as a stranger to these far lands, go back to Dare in a common open boat with stones for ballast.

"This is the loneliest place I have ever seen," Miss Gertrude White was saying on this the third morning after her arrival. "It seems scarcely in the world at all. The sea cuts you off from everything you know ; it would have been nothing if we had come by rail."

They walked on in silence, the blue waves beside them curling a crisp white on the smooth sands.

"Pappy," said she, at length, "I suppose if I lived here for six months no one in England would know anything about me? If I were mentioned at all, they would think I was dead. Perhaps some day I might meet some one from England ; and I would have to say, 'Don't you know who I am? Did you never hear of one called Gertrude White? I was Gertrude White.'"

"No doubt," said her father, cautiously.

"And when Mr. Lemuel's portrait of me appears in the Academy, people would be saying, 'Who is that?' *Miss Gertrude White, as Juliet?* Ah, there was an actress of that name. Or was she an amateur? She married somebody in the Highlands. I suppose she is dead now?"

"It is one of the most gratifying instances, Gerty, of the position you have made," her father observed, in his slow and sententious way, "that Mr. Lemuel should be so willing, after having refused to exhibit at the Academy for so many years, to make an exception in the case of your portrait."

"Well, I hope my face will not get burned by the sea-air and the sun," she said. "You know he wants two or three more sittings. And do you know, pappy, I have sometimes thought of asking you to tell me honestly—not to encourage me with flattery, you know—whether my face has really that high-strung pitch of expression when I am about to drink the poison in the cell. Do I really look like Mr. Lemuel's portrait of me?"

"It is your very self, Gerty," her father said, with decision. "But then Mr. Lemuel is a man of genius. Who but himself could have caught the very soul of your acting and fixed it on canvas?"

She hesitated for a moment, and then there was a flush of genuine enthusiastic pride mantling on her forehead as she said, frankly,—

"Well, then, I wish I could see myself!"

Mr. White said nothing. He had watched this daughter or his through the long winter months. Occasionally, when he heard her utter sentiments such as these—and when he saw her keenly sensitive to the flattery bestowed upon her by the people assembled at Mr. Lemuel's little gatherings, he had asked himself whether it was possible she could ever marry Sir Keith Macleod. But he was too wise to risk re-awakening her rebellious fits by any encouragement. In any case, he had some experience of this young lady; and what was the use of combatting one of her moods at five o'clock, when at six o'clock she would be arguing in the contrary direction, and at seven convinced that the *viv media* was the straight road? Moreover, if the worst came to the worst, there would be some compensation in the fact of Miss White changing her name for that of Lady Macleod.

Just as quickly she changed her mood on the present occasion. She was looking again far over the darkly blue and ruffled seas toward the white-sailed yacht.

"He must have gone away in the dark to get that boat for us," said she, musingly. "Poor fellow, how very generous and kind he is! Sometimes—shall I make the confession, pappy?—I wish he had picked out some one who could better have returned his warmth of feeling."

She called it a confession; but it was a question. And her father answered more bluntly than she had quite expected.

"I am not much of an authority on such points," said he, with a dry smile; "but I should have said, Gerty, that you have not been quite so effusive towards Sir Keith Macleod as some young ladies would have been on meeting their sweetheart after a long absence."

The pale face flushed, and she answered, hastily,

"But you know, papa, when you are knocked about from one boat to another, and expecting to be ill one minute and drowned the next, you don't have your temper improved, do you? And then perhaps you have been expecting a little too much romance?—and you find your Highland chieftain handing down loaves, with all the people in the steamer staring at him. But I really mean to make it up to him, papa, if I could only get settled down for a day or two and get into my own ways. Oh dear me!—this sun—it is too awfully dreadful! When I appear before Mr. Lemuel again, I shall be a mulatto!"

And as they walked along the burning sands, with the waves monotonously breaking, the white-sailed yacht came

nearer and more near ; and, indeed, the old *Umpire*, broad-beamed and heavy as she was, looked quite stately and swan-like as she came over the blue water. And they saw the gig lowered ; and the four oars keeping rhythmical time ; and presently they could make out the browned and glad face of Macleod.

"Why did you take so much trouble ?" said she to him—and she took his hand in a very kind way as he stepped on shore. "We could very well have gone back in the boat."

"Oh, but I want to take you round by Loch Tua," said he, looking with great gratitude into those friendly eyes. "And it was no trouble at all. And will you step into the gig now ?"

He took her hand and guided her along the rocks until she reached the boat ; and he assisted her father too. Then they pushed off, and it was with a good swing the men sent the boat through the lapping waves. And here was Hamish standing by the gangway to receive them ; and he was gravely respectful to the stranger lady, as he assisted her to get up the small wooden steps ; but there was no light of welcome in the keen gray eyes. He quickly turned away from her to give his orders ; for Hamish was on this occasion skipper, and had donned a smart suit of blue with brass buttons. Perhaps he would have been prouder of his buttons, and of himself, and of the yacht he had sailed for so many years, if it had been any other than Gertrude White who had now stepped on board.

But, on the other hand, Miss White was quite charmed with this shapely vessel and all its contents. If the frugal ways and commonplace duties and conversation of Castle Dare had somewhat disappointed her, and had seemed to her not quite in accordance with the heroic traditions of the clans, here, at least, was something which she could recognize as befitting her notion of the name and position of Sir Keith Macleod. Surely it must be with a certain masterful sense of possession that he would stand on those white decks, independent of all the world besides, with those sinewy, sun-browned, handsome fellows ready to go anywhere with him at his bidding ? It is true that Macleod, in showing her over the yacht, seemed to know far too much about tinned meats ; and he exhibited with some pride a cunning device for the stowage of soda-water ; and he even went the length of explaining to her the capacities of the linen-chest ; but then she could not fail to see that, in his eagerness to interest and

amuse her, he was as garrulous as a schoolboy showing to his companion a new toy. Miss White sat down in the saloon; and Macleod, who had but little experience in attending on ladies, and knew of but one thing that it was proper to recommend, said,—

“And will you have a cup of tea now, Gertrude? Johnny will get it to you in a moment.”

“No, thank you,” said she, with a smile, for she knew not how often he had offered her a cup of tea since her arrival in the Highlands. “But do you know, Keith, your yacht has a terrible bachelor look about it? All the comforts of it are in this saloon and in those two nice little state-rooms. Your lady’s cabin looks very empty; it is too elegant and fine, as if you were afraid to leave a book or a match-box in it. Now, if you were to turn this into a lady’s yacht; you would have to remove that pipe-rack, and the guns and rifles and bags.”

“Oh,” said he, anxiously, “I hope you do not smell any tobacco?”

“Not at all,” said she. “It was only a fancy. Of course you are not likely to turn your yacht into a lady’s yacht.”

He started and looked at her. But she had spoken quite thoughtlessly, and had now turned to her father.

When they went on deck again they found that the *Umpire*, beating up in the face of a light northerly breeze, had run out for a long tack almost to the Dutchman’s Cap; and from a certain distance they could see the grim shores of this desolate island, with its faint tinge of green grass over the brown of its plateau of rock. And then Hamish called out, “Ready, about!” and presently they were slowly leaving behind that lonely Dutchman and making away for the distant entrance to Loch Tua. The breeze was slight; they made but little way; far on the blue waters they watched the white gulls sitting buoyant; and the sun was hot on their hands. What did they talk about in this summer idleness? Many a time he had dreamed of his thus sailing over the clear seas with the fair Fionaghal from the South, until at times his heart, grown sick with yearning, was ready to despair of the impossible. And yet here she was sitting on a deck-stool near him—the wide-apart, long-lashed eyes occasionally regarding him—a neglected book open on her lap—the small gloved hands toying with the cover. Yet there was no word of love spoken. There was only a friendly conversation, and the idle passing of a summer day. It was something to know that her breathing was near him.

Then the breeze died away altogether, and they were left altogether motionless on the glassy blue sea. The great sails hung limp, without a single flap or quiver in them; the red ensign clung to the jigger-mast; Hamish, though he stood by the tiller, did not even put his hand on that bold and notable representation in wood of the sea-serpent.

"Come now, Hamish," Macleod said, fearing this monotonous idleness would weary his fair guest, "you will tell us now one of the old stories that you used to tell me when I was a boy."

Hamish had, indeed, told the young Macleod many a mysterious tale of magic and adventure, but he was not disposed to repeat any one of these in broken English in order to please this lady from the South.

"It is no more of the stories I hef now, Sir Keith," said he. "It was a long time since I had the stories."

"Oh, I could construct one myself," said Miss White, lightly. "Don't I know how they all begin? '*There was once a king in Erin, and he had a son and this son it was who would take the world for his pillow. But before he set out on his travels, he took counsel of the falcon, and the hoodie, and the otter. And the falcon said to him, go to the right; and the hoodie said to him, you will be wise now if you go to the left; but the otter said to him, now take my advice,*' etc., etc."

"You have been a diligent student," Macleod said, laughing heartily. "And, indeed, you might go on with the story and finish it; for who knows now when we shall get back to Dare?"

It was after a long period of thus lying in dead calm—with the occasional appearance of a diver on the surface of the shining blue sea—that Macleod's sharply observant eye was attracted by an odd thing that appeared far away at the horizon.

"What do you think is that now?" said he, with a smile.

They looked steadfastly, and saw only a thin line of silver light, almost like the back of a knife, in the distant dark blue.

"The track of a seal swimming under water," Mr. White suggested.

"Or a shoal of fish," his daughter said.

"Watch!"

The sharp line of light slowly spread; a trembling silver-gray took the place of the dark blue; it looked as if invisible fingers were rushing out and over the glassy surface. Then

they felt a cool freshness in the hot air; the red ensign swayed a bit; then the great mainsail flapped idly; and finally the breeze came gently blowing over the sea, and on again they went through the now rippling water. And as the slow time passed in the glare of the sunlight, Staffa lay on the still water a dense mass of shadow; and they went by Lunga; and they drew near to the point of Gometra, where the black skarts were sitting on the exposed rocks. It was like a dream of sunlight, and fair colors, and summer quiet.

"I cannot believe," said she to him, "that those fierce murders and revenges took place in such beautiful scenes as these. How could they?"

And then, in the broad and still waters of Loch Tua, with the lonely rocks of Ulva close by them, they were again becalmed; and now it was decided that they should leave the yacht there at certain moorings, and should get into the gig and be pulled through the shallow channel between Ulva and Mull that connects Loch Tua with Loch-na-Keal. Macleod had been greatly favored by the day chosen at haphazard for this water promenade: at the end of it he was gladdened to hear Miss White say that she had never seen anything so lovely on the face of the earth.

And yet it was merely a question of weather. To-morrow they might come back and find the water a ruffled leaden color; the waves washing over the rocks; Ben More invisible behind driving clouds. But now, as those three sat in the stern of the gig, and were gently pulled by the sweep of the oars, it seemed to one at least of them that she must have got into fairyland. The rocky shores of Ulva lay on one side of this broad and winding channel, the flatter shores of Mull on the other, and between lay a perfect mirror of water, in which everything was so accurately reflected that it was quite impossible to define the line at which the water and the land met. In fact, so vivid was the reflection of the blue and white sky on the surface of the water that it appeared to her as if the boat was suspended in mid-air—a sky below, a sky above. And then the beauty of the landscape that enclosed this wonderful mirror—the soft green foliage above the Ulva rocks; the brilliant yellow-brown of the sea-weed, with here there a gray heron standing solitary and silent as a ghost over the pools; ahead of them, towering above this flat and shining and beautiful landscape, the awful majesty of the mountains around Loch-na-Keal—the monarch of them, Ben More, showing a cone of dark and thunderous purple under

a long and heavy swathe of cloud. Far away, too, on their right, stretched the splendid rampart of the Gribun cliffs, a soft sunlight on the grassy greens of their summits; a pale and brilliant blue in the shadows of the huge and yawning caves. And so still it was, and the air so fine and sweet: it was a day for the idling of happy lovers.

What jarred, then? Not the silent appearance of the head of a seal in that shining plain of blue and white; for the poor old fellow only regarded the boat for a second or two with his large and pathetic eyes, and then quietly disappeared. Perhaps it was this—that Miss White was leaning over the side of the boat, and admiring very much the wonderful hues of groups of sea-weed below, that were all distinctly visible in the marvellously clear water. There were beautiful green plants that spread their flat fingers over the silver-white sands; and huge rolls of purple and sombre brown; and long strings that came up to the surface—the trceries and decorations of these haunts of the mermaid.

“It is like a pantomime,” she said. “You would expect to see a burst of lime-light, and Neptune appearing with a silver trident and crown. Well, it only shows that the scene-painters are nearer nature than most people imagine. I should never have thought there was anything so beautiful in the sea.”

And then again she said, when they had rounded Ulva, and got a glimpse of the open Atlantic again,

“Where is it, Keith, you proposed to sink all the theatres in England for the benefit of the dolphins and the lobsters?”

He did not like these references to the theatre.

“It was only a piece of nonsense,” said he, abruptly.

But then she begged him so prettily to get the men to sing the boat-song, that he good-humoredly took out a sheet of paper and a pencil, and said to her,—

“If I write it down for you, I must write it as it is pronounced. For how would you know that *Fhir a bhata, na horo eile* is pronounced *Feer a vahta na horo ailya*?”

“And perhaps, then,” said she, with a charming smile, “writing it down would spoil it altogether? But you will ask them to sing it for me.”

He said a word or two in the Gaelic to Sandy, who was rowing stroke; and Sandy answered with a short, quick laugh of assent.

“I have asked them if they would drink your health,” Macleod said, “and they have not refused. It would be a

great compliment to them if you would fill out the whiskey yourself ; here is my flask."

She took that formidable vessel in her small hands, and the men rested on their oars ; and then the metal cup was passed along. Whether it was the dram, or whether it was the old familiar chorus they struck up—

" Fhir a bhata (na horo eile)
Fhir a bhata (na horo eile)
Fhir a bhata (na horo eile)
Chead soire slann leid ge thobh a theid u,"

certain it is that the boat swung forward with a new strength, and ere long they beheld in the distance the walls of Castle Dare. And here was Janet at the small quay, greatly distressed because of the discomfort to which Miss White must have been subjected.

" But I have been telling Sir Keith," she said, with a sweet smile, " that I have come through the most beautiful place I have ever seen in the world."

This was not, however, what she was saying to herself when she reached the privacy of her own room. Her thoughts took a different turn.

" And if it does seem impossible "—this was her inward speech to herself—" that those wild murders should have been committed in so beautiful a place, at least there will be a fair chance of one occurring when I tell him that I have signed an engagement that will last till Christmas. But what good could come of being in a hurry ? "

CHAPTER XXXV.

A CAVE IN MULL.

OF love not a single word had so far been said between these two. It was a high sense of courtesy that on his part had driven him to exercise this severe self-restraint ; he would not invite her to be his guest, and then take advantage of the various opportunities offered to plague her with the vehemence and passionate yearning of his heart. For during all those long winter months he had gradually learned,

from the correspondence which he so carefully studied, that she rather disliked protestation; and when he hinted that he thought her letters to him were somewhat cold, she only answered with a playful humor; and when he tried to press her to some declaration about her leaving the stage or about the time of their marriage, she evaded the point with an extreme cleverness which was so good-natured and friendly that he could scarcely complain. Occasionally there were references in these letters that awakened in his breast a tumult of jealous suspicions and fears; but then again he consoled himself by looking forward to the time when she should be released from all those environments that he hated and dreaded. He would have no more fear when he could take her hand and look into her eyes.

And now that Miss Gertrude White was actually in Castle Dare—now that he could walk with her along the lonely mountain-slopes and show her the wonders of the Western seas and the islands—what was it that still occasioned that vague unrest? His nervous anxiety that she should be pleased with all she saw? or a certain critical coldness in her glance? or the consciousness that he was only entertaining a passing visitor—a beautiful bird that had alighted on his hand, and that the next moment would be winging its flight away into the silvery South?

“You are becoming a capital sailor,” he said to her one day, with a proud light on his face. “You have no fear at all of the sea now.”

He and she and the cousin Janet—Mr. White had some letters to answer, and had stayed at home—were in the stern of the gig, and they were being rowed along the coast below the giant cliffs of Gribun. Certainly if Miss White had confessed to being a little nervous, she might have been excused. It was a beautiful, fresh, breezy, summer day; but the heavy Atlantic swell, that slowly raised and lowered the boat as the men rowed along, passed gently and smoothly on, and then went booming and roaring and crashing over the sharp black rocks that were quite close at hand.

“I think I would soon get over my fear of the sea,” she said, gently.

Indeed, it was not that that was most likely to impress her on this bright day—it was the awful loneliness and desolation of the scene around her. All along the summit of the great cliffs lay heavy banks of cloud that moved and wreathed themselves together, with mysterious patches of darkness

here and there that suggested the entrance into far valleys in the unseen mountains behind. And if the outer surface of these precipitous cliffs was brightened by sunlight, and if there was a sprinkling of grass on the ledges, every few minutes they passed the yawning archway of a huge cavern, around which the sea was roaring with a muffled and thunderous noise. He thought she would be interested in the extraordinary number and variety of the sea-birds about—the solemn cormorants sitting on the ledges, the rock-pigeons shooting out from the caves, the sea-pyots whirring along the rocks like lightning-flashes of color, the lordly osprey, with his great wings outstretched and motionless, sailing slowly in the far blue overhead. And no doubt she looked at all these things with a forced interest; and she herself now could name the distant islands out in the tossing Atlantic; and she had in a great measure got accustomed to the amphibious life at Dare. But as she listened to the booming of the waves around those awful recesses; and as she saw the jagged and angry rocks suddenly appear through the liquid mass of the falling sea; and as she looked abroad on the unknown distances of that troubled ocean, and thought of the life on those remote and lonely islands, the spirit of a summer holiday forsook her altogether, and she was silent.

“And you will have no fear of the beast when you go into Mackinnon’s cave,” said Janet Macleod to her, with a friendly smile, “because no one has ever heard of it again. Do you know, it was a strange thing? They saw in the sand the footprint of an animal that is not known to any one about here; even Keith himself did not know what it was—”

“I think it was a wild-cat,” said he.

“And the men they had nothing to do then; and they went all about the caves, but they could see nothing of it. And it has never come back again.”

“And I suppose you are not anxious for its coming back?” Miss White said.

“Perhaps you will be very lucky and see it some day, and I know that Keith would like to shoot it, whatever it is.”

“That is very likely,” Miss White said, without any apparent sarcasm.

By and by they paused opposite the entrance to a cave that seemed even larger and blacker than the others; and then Miss White discovered that they were considering at what point they could most easily effect a landing. Already through the singularly clear water she could make out vague

green masses that told of the presence of huge blocks of yellow rock far below them; and as they cautiously went farther toward the shore, a man at the bow calling out to them, these blocks of rock became clearer and clearer, until it seemed as if those glassy billows that glided under the boat, and then went crashing in white foam a few yards beyond, must inevitably transfix the frail craft on one of these jagged points. But at length they managed to run the bow of the gig into a somewhat sheltered place, and two of the men, jumping knee-deep into the water, hauled the keel still farther over the grating shell-fish of the rock; and then Macleod, scrambling out, assisted Miss White to land.

"Do you not come with us?" Miss White called back to the boat.

"Oh, it is many a time I have been in the cave," said Janet Macleod; "and I will have the luncheon ready for you. And you will not stay long in the cave, for it is cold and damp."

He took her hand, for the scrambling over the rough rocks and stones was dangerous work for unfamiliar ankles. They drew nearer to this awful thing, that rose far above them, and seemed waiting to enclose them and shut them in forever. And whereas about the other caves there were plenty of birds flying, with their shrill screams denoting their terror or resentment, there was no sign of life at all about this black and yawning chasm, and there was an absolute silence, but for the rolling of the breakers behind them that only produced vague and wandering echoes. As she advanced over the treacherous shingle, she became conscious of a sort of twilight appearing around her. A vast black thing—black as night and still as the grave—was ahead of her; but already the change from the blaze of sunlight outside to this partial darkness seemed strange on the eyes. The air grew colder. As she looked up at the tremendous walls, and at the mysterious blackness beyond, she grasped his hand more tightly, though the walking on the wet sand was now comparatively easy. And as they went farther and farther into this blackness, there was only a faint, strange light that made an outline of the back of his figure, leaving his face in darkness; and when he stopped to examine the sand, she turned and looked back, and behold the vast portal by which they entered had now dwindled down into a small space of bewildering white.

"No," said he, and she was startled by the hollow tones

of his voice ; " I cannot find any traces of the boat news ; they have all gone."

Then he produced a candle and lit it ; and as they advanced farther into the blackness, there was visible this solitary star of red fire, that threw dull, mysterious gleams from time to time on some projecting rocks.

" You must give me your hand again, Keith," said she, in a low voice ; and when he shifted the candle, and took her hand in his, he found that it was trembling somewhat.

" Will you go any farther ? " said he.

" No."

They stood and looked around. The darkness seemed without limits ; the red light was insufficient to produce anything like an outline of this immense place, even in faint and wandering gleams.

" If anything were to move, Keith," said she, " I should die."

" Oh, nonsense ! " said he, in a cheerful way ; but the hollow echoes of the cavern made his voice sound sepulchral. " There is no beast at all in here, you may be sure. And I have often thought of the fright a wild-cat or a beaver may have got when he came in here in the night, and then discovered he had stumbled on a lot of sleeping men——"

" Of men ! "

" They say this was a sanctuary of the Culdees ; and I often wonder how the old chaps got their food. I am afraid they must have often fallen back on the young cormorants : that is what Major Stuart calls an expeditious way of dining—for you eat two courses, fish and meat, at the same time. And if you go further along, Gertrude, you will come to the great altar-stone they used."

" I would rather not go," said she. " I—I do not like this place. I think we will go back now, Keith."

As they cautiously made their way back to the glare of the entrance, she still held his hand tight ; and she did not speak at all. Their footsteps echoed strangely in this hollow space. And then the air grew suddenly warm ; and there was a glow of daylight around ; and although her eyes were rather bewildered, she breathed more freely, and there was an air of relief on her face.

" I think I will sit down for a moment, Keith," said she ; and then he noticed, with a sudden alarm, that her cheeks were rather pale.

"Are you ill?" said he, with a quick anxiety in his eyes "Were you frightened?"

"Oh, no!" said she, with a forced cheerfulness, and she sat down for a moment on one of the smooth boulders. "You must not think I am such a coward as that. But—the chilling atmosphere—the change—made me a little faint."

"Shall I run down to the boat for some wine for you? I know that Janet has brought some claret."

"Oh, not at all!" said she—and he saw with a great delight that her color was returning. "I am quite well now. But I will rest for a minute, if you are in no hurry, before scrambling down those stones again."

He was in no hurry; on the contrary, he sat down beside her and took her hand.

"You know, Gerty," said he, "it will be some time before I can learn all that you like and dislike, and what you can bear, and what pleases you best; it will be some time, no doubt; but then, when I have learned, you will find that no one will look after you so carefully as I will."

"I know you are very kind to me," said she, in a low voice.

"And now," said he, very gently, and even timidly, but his firm hand held her languid one with something of a more nervous clasp, "if you would only tell me, Gerty, that on such and such a day you would leave the stage altogether, and on such and such a day you would let me come to London—and you know the rest—then I would go to my mother, and there would be no need of any more secrecy, and instead of her treating you merely as a guest she would look on you as her daughter, and you might talk with her frankly."

She did not at all withdraw the small gloved hand, with its fringe of fur at the end of the narrow sleeve. On the contrary, as it lay there in his warm grasp, it was like the small, white, furred foot of a ptarmigan, so little and soft and gentle was it.

"Well, you know, Keith," she said, with a great kindness in the clear eyes, though they were cast down, "I think the secret between you and me should be known to nobody at all but ourselves—any more than we can reasonably help. And it is a very great step to take; and you must not expect me to be in a hurry, for no good ever came of that. I did not think you would have cared so much—I mean, a man has so many distractions and occupations of shooting, and going away in your yacht and all that—I fancy—I am a little

surprised—that you make so much of it. We have a great deal to learn yet, Keith ; we don't know each other very well. By and by we may be quite sure that there is no danger ; that we understand each other ; that nothing and nobody is likely to interfere. But wouldn't you prefer to be left in the meantime just a little bit free—not quite pledged, you know, to such a serious thing——”

He had been listening to these faltering phrases in a kind of dazed and pained stupor. It was like the water overwhelming a drowning man. But at last he cried out—and he grasped both her hands in the sudden vehemence of the moment——

“Gerty, you are not drawing back ! You do not despair of our being husband and wife ! What is it that you mean ?”

“Oh, Keith !” said she, quickly withdrawing one of her hands, “you frighten me when you talk like that ! You do not know what you are doing—you have hurt my wrist !”

“Oh, I hope not !” said he. “Have I hurt your hand, Gerty?—and I would cut off one of mine to save you a scratch ! But you will tell me now that you have no fears—that you don't want to draw back ! I would like to take you back to Dare, and be able to say to every one, ‘Do you know that this is my wife—that by and by she is coming to Dare—and you will all be kind to her for her own sake and for mine.’ And if there is anything wrong, Gerty, if there is anything you would like altered, I would have it altered. We have a rude way of life ; but every one would be kind to you. And if the life here is too rough for you, I would go anywhere with you that you choose to live. I was looking at the houses in Essex. I would go to Essex, or anywhere you might wish ; that need not separate us at all. And why are you so cold and distant, Gerty ? Has anything happened here to displease you ? Have we frightened you by too much of the boats and of the sea ? Would you rather live in an English county away from the sea ? But I would do that for you, Gerty—if I was never to see a sea-bird again.”

And in spite of himself tears rose quickly to his eyes ; for she seemed so far away from him, even as he held her hand ; and his heart would speak at last—or break.

“It was all the winter months I was saying to myself, ‘Now you will not vex her with too much pleading, for she has much trouble with her work ; and that is enough ; and a man can bear his own trouble.’ And once or twice, when we have been caught in a bad sea, I said to myself, ‘And what

matter now if the end comes?—for perhaps that would only release her.’ But then again, Gerty, I thought of the time you gave me the red rose ; and I said, ‘ Surely her heart will not go away from me ; and I have plenty to live for yet ! ’ ”

Then she looked him frankly in the face, with those beautiful, clear, sad eyes.

“ You deserve all the love a woman can give you, Keith ; for you have a man’s heart. And I wish I could make you a fair return for all your courage, and gentleness, and kindness—”

“ Ah, do not say that,” he said, quickly. “ Do not think I am complaining of you, Gerty. It is enough—it is enough—I thank God for his mercy to me ; for there never was any man so glad as I was when you gave me the red rose. And now, sweetheart—now you will tell me that I will put away all this trouble and have no more fears ; and there will be no need to think of what you are doing far away ; and there will be one day that all the people will know—and there will be laughing and gladness that day ; and if we will keep the pipes away from you, all the people about will have the pipes, and there will be a dance and a song that day. Ah, Gerty, you must not think harshly of the people about here. They have their ways. They would like to please you. But my heart is with them ; and a marriage-day would be no marriage-day to me that I did not spend among my own people—my own people.”

He was talking quite wildly. She had seen him in this mood once or twice before, and she was afraid.

“ But you know, Keith,” said she, gently, and with averted eyes, “ a great deal has to be done before then. And a woman is not so impulsive as a man ; and you must not be angry if I beg for a little time—”

“ And what is time ? ” said he, in the same glad and wild way—and now it was his hand holding hers that was trembling. “ It will all go by in a moment—like a dream—when we know that the one splendid day is coming. And I will send a haunch to the Dubh Artach men that morning ; and I will send a haunch to Skerryvore ; and there will not be a man in Iona, or Coll, or Mull, that will not have his dram that day. And what will you do, Gerty—what will you do ? Oh, I will tell you now what you will do on that morning. You will take out some sheets of the beautiful, small, scented paper ; and you will write to this theatre and to that theatre : ‘ Good-by—perhaps you were useful to me once, and I bear you

no ill-will: but— Good-by forever and ever! And I will have all the children that I took to the Crystal Palace last summer given a fine dinner; and the six boy-pipers will play *Mrs. Macleod of Raasay* again; and they will have a fine reel once more. There will be many a one know that you are married that day, Gerty. And when is the day to be, Gerty? Cannot you tell me now?"

"There is a drop of rain!" she exclaimed; and she suddenly sprang to her feet. The skies were black overhead. "Oh, dear me!" she said, "how thoughtless of us to leave your poor cousin Janet in that open boat, and a shower coming on! Please give me your hand now, Keith. And you must not take all these things so seriously to heart, you know; or I will say you have not the courage of a feeble woman like myself. And do you think the shower will pass over?"

"I do not know," said he, in a vague way, as if he had not quite understood the question; but he took her hand, and in silence guided her down to the rocks, where the boat was ready to receive them.

And now they saw the strange transformation that had come over the world. The great troubled sea was all of a dark slate-green, with no glad ripples of white, but with long squally drifts of black; and a cold wind was blowing gustily in; and there were hurrying clouds of a leaden hue tearing across the sky. As for the islands—where were they? Ulva was visible, to be sure, and Colonsay—both of them a heavy and gloomy purple; and nearer at hand the rock of Errisker showed in a wan, gray light between the lowering sky and the squally sea; but Lunga, and Fladda, and Staffa, and Iona, and even the long promontory of the Ross of Mull, were all hidden away behind the driving mists of rain.

"Oh you lazy people!" Janet Macleod cried, cheerfully—she was not at all frightened by the sudden storm. "I thought the wild beast had killed you in the cave. And shall we have luncheon now, Keith, or go back at once?"

He cast an eye towards the westward horizon and the threatening sky: Janet noticed at once that he was rather pale.

"We will have luncheon as they pull us back," said he, in an absent way, as if he was not quite sure of what was happening around him.

He got her into the boat, and then followed. The men, **not** sorry to get away from these jagged rocks, took to their

oars with a will. And then he sat silent and distraught, as the two women, muffled up in their cloaks, chatted cheerfully, and partook of the sandwiches and claret that Janet had got out of the basket. "*Fhir a bhata*," the men sang to themselves; and they passed under the great cliffs, all black and thunderous now; and the white surf was springing over the rocks. Macleod neither ate nor drank; but sometimes he joined in the conversation in a forced way; and occasionally he laughed more loudly than the occasion warranted.

"Oh yes," he said, "oh yes, you are becoming a good sailor now, Gertrude. You have no longer any fear of the water."

"You will become like little Johnny Wickes, Miss White," the cousin Janet said, "the little boy I showed you the other day. He has got to be like a duck in his love for the water. And, indeed, I should have thought he would have got a fright when Keith saved him from drowning; but no."

"Did you save him from being drowned?" she said, turning to him. "And you did not tell me the story?"

"It was no story," said he. "He fell into the water, and we picked him up somehow;" and then he turned impatiently to the men, and said some words to them in the Gaelic, and there was no more singing of the Farewell to the Boatman after that.

"They got home to Castle Dare before the rain came on; though, indeed, it was but a passing shower, and it was succeeded by a bright afternoon that deepened into a clear and brilliant sunset; but as they went up through the moist-smelling larchwood—and as Janet happened to fall behind for a moment, to speak to a herdboy who was by the wayside—Macleod said to his companion,—

"And have you no other word for me, Gertrude?"

Then she said with a very gracious smile,

"You must be patient, Keith. Are we not very well off as we are? I know a good many people who are not quite so well off. And I have no doubt we shall have courage to meet whatever good or bad fortune the days may bring us; and if it is good, then we shall shake hands over it, just as the village people do in an opera."

Fine phrases; though this man, with the dark and hopeless look in his eyes, did not seem to gain much gladness from them. And she forgot to tell him about that engagement which was to last till Christmas; perhaps if she had told him just then he would scarcely have heard her.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE NEW TRAGEDY.

His generous, large nature fought hard to find excuses for her. He strove to convince himself that this strange coldness, this evasion, this half-repellent attitude, was but a form of maiden coyness. It was her natural fear of so great a change. It was the result, perhaps, of some last lingering look back to the scene of her artistic triumphs. It did not even occur to him as a possibility that this woman with her unstable sympathies and her fatally facile imagination, should have taken up what was now the very end and aim of his life, and have played with the pretty dream until she grew tired of the toy, and was ready to let her wandering fancy turn to something other and new.

He dared not even think of that; but all the same, as he stood at this open window alone, an unknown fear had come over him. It was a fear altogether vague and undefined; but it seemed to have the power of darkening the daylight around him. Here was the very picture he had so often desired that she should see—the wind-swept Atlantic; the glad blue skies with their drifting clouds of summer white; the Erisgeir rocks; the green shores of Ulva; and Colonsay and Gometra and Staffa all shining in the sunlight; with the sea-birds calling, and the waves breaking, and the soft west wind stirring the fuchsia-bushes below the windows of Castle Dare. And it was all dark now; and the sea was a lonely thing—more lonely than ever it had been even during that long winter that he had said was like a grave.

And she?—at this moment she was down at the small bridge that crossed the burn. She had gone out to seek her father; had found him coming up through the larch-wood, and was now accompanying him back. They had rested here; he sitting on the weatherworn parapet of the bridge; she leaning over it, and idly dropping bits of velvet-green moss into the whirl of clear brown water below.

“I suppose we must be thinking of getting away from Castle Dare, Gerty,” said he.

"I shall not be sorry," she answered.

But even Mr. White was somewhat taken aback by the cool promptitude of this reply.

"Well, you know your own business best," he said to her. "It is not for me to interfere. I said from the beginning I would not interfere. But still I wish you would be a little more explicit, Gerty, and let one understand what you mean—whether, in fact, you do mean, or do not mean, to marry Macleod."

"And who said that I proposed not to marry him?" said she; but she still leaned over the rough stones and looked at the water. "The first thing that would make me decline would be the driving me into a corner—the continual goading, and reminding me of the duty I had to perform. There has been just a little too much of that here"—and at this point she raised herself so that she could regard her father when she wished—"and I really must say that I do not like to be taking a holiday with the feeling hanging over you that certain things are expected of you every other moment, and that you run the risk of being considered a very heartless and ungrateful person unless you do and say certain things you would perhaps rather not do and say. I should like to be let alone. I hate being goaded. And I certainly did not expect that you, too, papa, would try to drive me into a corner."

She spoke with some little warmth. Mr. White smiled.

"I was quite unaware, Gerty," said he, "that you were suffering this fearful persecution."

"You may laugh, but it is true," said she, and there was a trifle of color in her cheeks. "The serious interests I am supposed to be concerned about! Such profound topics of conversation! Will the steamer come by the south to-morrow, or round by the north? The Gometra men have had a good take of lobsters yesterday. Will the head-man at the Something lighthouse be transferred to some other lighthouse? and how will his wife and family like the change? They are doing very well with a subscription for a bell for the Free Church at Iona. The deer have been down at John Maclean's barley again. Would I like to visit the weaver at Iona who has such a wonderful turn for mathematics? and would I like to know the man at Salen who has the biographies of all the great men of the time in his head?"

Miss White had worked herself up to a pretty pitch of

contemptuous indignation ; her father was almost beginning to believe that it was real.

"It is all very well for the Macleods to interest themselves with these trumpery little local matters. They play the part of grand patron ; the people are proud to honor them ; it is a condescension when they remember the name of the crofter's youngest boy. But as for me—when I am taken about—well, I do not like being stared at as if they thought I was wearing too fine clothes. I don't like being continually placed in a position of inferiority through my ignorance—an old fool of a boatman saying 'Bless me !' when I have to admit that I don't know the difference between a sole and a flounder. I don't want to know. I don't want to be continually told. I wish these people would meet me on my own ground. I wish the Macleods would begin to talk after dinner about the Lord Chamberlain's interference with the politics of burlesque, and then perhaps they would not be so glib. I am tired of hearing about John Maclean's boat, and Donald Maclean's horse, and Sandy Maclean's refusal to pay the road-tax. And as for the drinking of whiskey that these sailors get through—well, it seems to me that the ordinary condition of things is reversed here altogether ; and if they ever put up an asylum in Mull, it will be a lunatic asylum for incurable abstainers."

"Now, now, Gerty !" said her father ; but all the same he rather liked to see his daughter get on her high horse, for she talked with spirit, and it amused him. "You must remember that Macleod looks on this as a holiday-time, and perhaps he may be a little lax in his regulations. I have no doubt it is because he is so proud to have you on board his yacht that he occasionally gives the men an extra glass ; and I am sure it does them no harm, for they seem to be as much in the water as out of it."

She paid no heed to this protest. She was determined to give free speech to her sense of wrong, and humiliation, and disappointment.

"What has been the great event since ever we came here—the wildest excitement the island can afford ?" she said. "the arrival of the pedlar ! A snuffy old man comes into the room, with a huge bundle wrapped up in dirty waterproof. Then there is a wild clatter of Gaelic. But suddenly, don't you know, there are one or two glances at me ; and the Gaelic stops ; and Duncan or John, or whatever they call him, begins to stammer in English, and I am shown coarse stock-

ings, and bundles of wool, and drugget petticoats, and cotton handkerchiefs. And then Miss Macleod buys a number of things which I know she does not want ; and I am looked on as a strange creature because I do not purchase a bundle of wool or a pair of stockings fit for a farmer. The Autolycus of Mull is not impressive, pappy. Oh, but I forgot the dramatic surprise—that also was to be an event, I have no doubt. I was suddenly introduced to a child dressed in a kilt ; and I was to speak to him ; and I suppose I was to be profoundly moved when I heard him speak to me in my own tongue in this out of the world place. My own tongue ! The horrid little wretch has not an *h*."

"Well, there's no pleasing you, Gerty," said he.

"I don't want to be pleased ; I want to be let alone," said she.

But she said this with just a little too much sharpness ; for her father was, after all, a human being ; and it did seem to him to be too bad that he should be taunted in this fashion, when he had done his best to preserve a wholly neutral attitude.

"Let me tell you this, madam," said he, in a playful manner, but with some decision in his tone, "that you may live to have the pride taken out of you. You have had a good deal of flattery and spoiling ; and you may find out you have been expecting too much. As for these Macleods here, I will say this—although I came here very much against my own inclination—that I defy any one to have been more kind, and courteous, and attentive than they have been to you. I don't care. It is not my business, as I tell you. But I must say, Gerty, that when you make a string of complaints as the only return for all their hospitality—their excessive and almost burdensome hospitality—I think that even I am bound to say a word. You forget how you come here. You, a perfect stranger, come here as engaged to marry the old lady's only son—to dispossess her—very probably to make impossible a match that she had set her heart on. And both she and her niece—you understand what I mean—instead of being cold, or at least formal, to you, seem to me to think of nothing from morning till night but how to surround you with kindness, in a way that Englishwomen would never think of. And this you call persecution ; and you are vexed with them because they won't talk to you about theatres—why, bless my soul, how long it is since you were yourself talking about theatres as if the very word choked you ?"

"Well, at least, pappy, I never thought you would turn against me," said she, as she put her head partly aside, and made a mouth as if she were about to cry; "and when mamma made you promise to look after Carry and me, I am sure she never thought—"

Now this was too much for Mr. White. In the small eyes behind the big gold spectacles there was a quick flash of fire.

"Don't be a fool, Gerty!" said he, in downright anger. "You know it is no use your trying to humbug me. If you think the ways of this house are too poor and mean for your grand notions of state—if you think he has not enough money, and you are not likely to have fine dinners and entertainments for your friends—if you are determined to break off the match—why, then do it! but, I tell you, don't try to humbug me!"

Miss White's pathetic attitude suddenly vanished. She drew herself up with much dignity and composure, and said,

"At all events, sir, I have been taught my duty to you; and I think it better not to answer you."

With that she moved off toward the house; and Mr. White, taking to whistling, began to do as she had been doing—idly throwing bits of moss into the rushing burn. After all, it was none of his business.

But that evening, some little time before dinner, it was proposed they should go for a stroll down to the shore; and then it was that Miss White thought she would seize the occasion to let Macleod know of her arrangements for the coming autumn and winter. Ordinarily, on such excursions, she managed to walk with Janet Macleod—the old lady of Castle Dare seldom joined them—leaving Macleod to follow with her father; but this time she so managed it that Macleod and she left the house together. Was he greatly overjoyed? There was a constrained and anxious look on his face that had been there too much of late.

"I suppose Oscar is more at home here than in Bury Street, St. James's?" said she, as the handsome collie went down the path before them.

"No doubt," said he, absently: he was not thinking of any collie.

"What beautiful weather we are having," said she, to this silent companion. "It is always changing, but always beautiful. There is only one other aspect I should like to see—the snow time."

"We have not much snow here," said he. "It seldom lies in the winter."

This was a strange conversation for two engaged lovers it was not much more interesting than their talk—how many ages ago?—at Charing Cross station. But then, when she had said to him, "*Ought we to take tickets?*" she had looked into his face with those appealing, innocent, beautiful eyes. Now her eyes never met his. She was afraid.

She managed to lead up to her announcement skilfully enough. By the time they reached the shore an extraordinarily beautiful sunset was shining over the sea and the land, something so bewildering and wonderful that they all four stopped to look at it. The Atlantic was a broad expanse of the palest and most brilliant green, with the pathway of the sun a flashing line of gold coming right across until it met the rocks, and there was a jet black against the glow. Then the distant islands of Colonsay, and Staffa, and Lunga, and Fladda lying on this shining green sea, appeared to be of a perfectly transparent bronze; while nearer at hand the long ranges of cliffs were becoming a pale rose-red under the darkening blue-gray sky. It was a blaze of color such as she had never even dreamed of as being possible in nature; nothing she had as yet seen in these northern latitudes had at all approached it. And as she stood there, and looked at those transparent islands of bronze on the green sea, she said to him,—

"Do you know, Keith, this is not at all like the place I had imagined as the scene of the gloomy stories you used to tell me about the revenges of the clans. I have been frightened once or twice since I came here, no doubt, by the wild sea, and the darkness of the cathedral, and so forth; but the longer I stay the less I see to suggest those awful stories. How could you associate such an evening as this with a frightful tragedy? Do you think those people ever existed who were supposed to have suffocated, or slaughtered, or starved to death any one who opposed their wishes?"

"And I do not suppose they troubled themselves much about fine sunsets," said he. "That was not what they had to think about in those days."

"Perhaps not," said she, lightly; "but, you know, I had expected to find a place from which I could gain some inspiration for tragedy—for I should like to try, once for all—if I *should* have to give up the stage—whether I had the stuff of a tragic actress in me. And, you know, in that case, I

ought to dress in black velvet, and carry a taper through dungeons, and get accustomed to storms, and gloom, and thunder and lightning."

"We have no appliances here for the education of an actress—I am very sorry," said he.

"Now, Keith, that is hardly fair," said she, with a smile. "You know it is only a trial. And you saw what they said of my *Juliet*, Oh, did I tell you about the new tragedy that is coming out?"

"No, I do not think you did," said he.

"Ah, well, it is a great secret as yet; but there is no reason why you should not hear of it."

"I am not anxious to hear of it," said he, without any rudeness.

"But it concerns me," she said, "and so I must tell you. It is written by a brother of Mr. Lemuel, the artist I have often spoken to you about. He is by profession an architect; but if this play should turn out to be as fine as some people say it is, he ought to take to dramatic writing. In fact, all the Lemuels—there are three brothers of them, you know—are like Michael Angelo and Leonardo—artists to the fingertips, in every direction—poets, painters, sculptors, and all the rest of it. And I do think I ought to feel flattered by their choice in asking me to play the heroine; for so much depends on the choice of the actress——"

"And you are still to act?" said he, quickly, though he spoke in a low voice, so that those behind should not hear.

"Surely I explained to you?" said she, in a pleasant manner. "After all, lifelong habits are not so easily cast aside; and I knew you would be generous, and bear with me a little bit, Keith."

He turned to her. The glow of the sunset caught his face. There was a strange, hopeless sadness in his eyes.

"Generous to you?" said he. "You know I would give you my life if that would serve you. But this is worse than taking my life from me."

"Keith, Keith!" said she, in gentle protest, "I don't know what you mean. You should not take things so seriously. What is it, after all? It was as an actress that you knew me first. What is the difference of a few months more or less? If I had not been an actress, you would never have known me—do you recollect that? By the way, has Major Stuart's wife got a piano?"

He turned and stared at her for a second, in a bewildered way.

"Oh yes," said he, with a laugh, "Mrs. Stuart has got a piano ; she has got a very good piano. And what is the song you would sing now, sweetheart? Shall we finish up and have done with it, with a song at the end? That is the way in the theatre, you know—a dance and a song as the people go. And what shall our song be now? There was one that Norman Ogilvie used to sing."

"I don't know why you should talk to me like that, Keith," said she, though she seemed somewhat frightened by this fierce gayety. "I was going to tell you that if Mrs. Stuart had a piano I would very gladly sing one or two songs for your mother and Miss Macleod when we went over there to-morrow. You have frequently asked me. Indeed, I have brought with me the very songs I sung to you the first time I saw you—at Mrs. Ross's."

Instantly his memory flew back to that day—to the hushed little room over the sunlit gardens—to the beautiful, gentle, sensitive girl who seemed to have so strange an interest in the Highlands—to the wonderful thrill that went through him when she began to sing with an exquisite pathos, "A wee bird cam' to our ha' door," and to the prouder enthusiasm that stirred him when she sang, "I'll to Lochiel, and Appin, and kneel to them!" These were fine, and tender, and proud songs. There was no gloom about them—nothing about a grave, and the dark winter-time, and a faithless lost love. This song of Norman Ogilvie's that he had gayly proposed they should sing now? What had Major Stuart, or his wife, or any one in Mull to do with "Death's black wine?"

"I meant to tell you, Keith," said she, somewhat nervously, "that I had signed an engagement to remain at the Piccadilly Theatre till Christmas next. I knew you wouldn't mind—I mean, you would be considerate, and you would understand how difficult it is for one to break away all at once from one's old associations. And then, you know, Keith," said she, shyly, "though you may not like the theatre, you ought to be proud of my success, as even my friends and acquaintances are. And as they are all anxious to see me make another appearance in tragedy, I really should like to try it ; so that when my portrait appears in the Academy next year, people may not be saying, 'Look at the impertinence of that girl appearing as a tragic actress when she can do nothing beyond the familiar modern comedy!' I should have told

you all about it before, Keith, but I know you hate to hear any talk about the theatre; and I sha'n't bore you again, you may depend on that. Isn't it time to go back now? See! the rose-color is away from Ulva now; it is quite a dark purple."

He turned in silence and led the way back. Behind them he could faintly hear Mr. White discoursing to Janet Macleod about the manner in which the old artists mixed their own pigments.

Then Macleod said, with a great gentleness and restraint, "And when you go away from here, Gertude, I suppose I must say good-by to you; and no one knows when we shall see each other again. You are returning to the theatre. If that is your wish, I would not try to thwart it. You know best what is the highest prize the world can give you. And how can I warn you against failure and disappointment? I know you will be successful. I know the people will applaud you, and your head will be filled with their praises. You are going forward to a new triumph, Gerty; and the first step you will take will be on my heart."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN UNDERSTANDING.

"PAPPY dear," said Miss White to her father, in a playful way, although it was a serious sort of playfulness, "I have a vague feeling that there is a little too much electricity in the atmosphere of this place just at present. I am afraid there may be an explosion; and you know my nerves can't stand much of a shock. I should be glad to get away."

By this time she had quite made up that little difference with her father—she did not choose to be left alone at a somewhat awkward crisis. She had told him she was sure he had not meant what he said about her; and she had expressed her sorrow for having provoked him; and there an end. And if Mr. White had been driven by his anger to be for the moment the ally of Macleod, he was not disinclined to take the other side now and let Miss White have her own will. The vast amount of training he had bestowed on her

through many long years was not to be thrown away after all.

"I told him last night," said she, "of my having signed an engagement till Christmas next."

"Oh, indeed!" said her father, quickly; looking at her over his spectacles.

"Yes," said she, thoughtfully, "and he was not so disturbed or angry as I had expected. Not at all. He was very kind about it. But I don't understand him."

"What do you not understand?"

"He has grown so strange of late—so sombre. Once, you know, he was the lightest-hearted young man—enjoying every minute of his life, you know—and really, pappy, I think—"

And here Miss White stopped.

"At all events," said she, quickly, "I want to be in a less dangerously excited atmosphere, where I can sit down and consider matters calmly. It was much better when he and I corresponded, then we could fairly learn what each other thought. Now I am almost afraid of him—I mean, I am afraid to ask him a question. I have to keep out of his way. And if it comes to that, pappy, you know, I feel now as if I was called on to act a part from morning till night, whereas I was always assured that if I left the stage and married him it was to be my natural self, and I should have no more need to pose and sham. However, that is an old quarrel between you and me, pappy, and we will put it aside. What's more to the purpose is this—it was half understood that when we left Castle Dare he was to come with us through at least a part of the Highlands."

"There was a talk of it."

"Don't you think," said Miss White, with some little hesitation, and with her eyes cast down—"don't you think that would be a little inconvenient?"

"I should say that was for you to decide," he answered, somewhat coldly; for it was too bad that she should be continually asking his advice and then openly disregarding it.

"I should think it would be a little uncomfortable," she said, demurely. "I fancy he has taken that engagement till Christmas a little more to heart than he chooses to reveal—that is natural—I knew it would be a disappointment; but then, you know, pappy, the temptation was very great, and I had almost promised the Lemuels to do what I could for the piece. And if I am to give up the stage, wouldn't it be

fine to wind up with a blaze of fireworks to astonish the public?"

"Are you so certain you will astonish the public?" her father said.

"I have the courage to try," she answered, readily. "And you are not going to throw cold water on my endeavors, are you, pappy? Well, as I was saying, it is perhaps natural for Sir Keith Macleod to feel a bit annoyed; and I am afraid if he went travelling with us, we should be continually skating on the edge of a quarrel. Besides, to tell you the truth, pappy—with all his kindness and gentleness, there is sometimes about him a sort of intensity that I scarcely like—it makes me afraid of him. If it were on the stage, I should say it was a splendid piece of acting—of the suppressed vehement kind, you know; but really—during a holiday-time, when one naturally wishes to enjoy the fine weather and gather strength for one's work—well, I do think he ought not to come with us, pappy."

"Very well; you can hint as much without being rude."

"I was thinking," said she, "of the Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin who were in that Newcastle company, and who went to Aberdeen. Do you remember them, pappy?"

"The low comedian, you mean?"

"Yes. Well, at all events they would be glad to see us. And so—don't you think?—we could let Macleod understand that we were going to see some friends in the North? Then he would not think of coming with us."

"The representation would scarcely be justifiable," observed Mr. White, with a profound air, "in ordinary circumstances. But, as you say, it would be neither for his comfort nor for yours that he should go with us."

"Comfort!" she exclaimed. "Much comfort I have had since I came here! Comfort I call quiet, and being let alone. Another fortnight at this place would give me brain fever—your life continually in danger either on the sea or by the cliffs—your feelings supposed to be always up at passion pitch—it is all a whirl of secret or declared emotions that don't give you a moment's rest. Oh, pappy, won't it be nice to have a day or two's quiet in our own home, with Carry and Marie? And you know Mr. Lemuel will be in town all the summer and winter. The material for *his* work he finds within himself. He doesn't need to scamper off like the rest of them to hunt out picturesque peasants and studies of waterfalls—trotting about the country with a note-book in hand—"

"Gerty, Gerty," said her father, with a smile, "your notions are unformed on that subject. What have I told you often?—that the artist is only a reporter. Whether he uses the pencil, or the pen, or his own face and voice, to express the highest thoughts and emotions of which he is conscious, he is only a reporter—a penny-a-liner whose words are written in fire. And you—don't you carry your note-book too?"

"I was not comparing myself with an artist like Mr. Lemuel, pappy. No, no. Of course I have to keep my eyes open, and pick up things that may be useful. His work is the work of intense spiritual contemplation—it is inspiration—"

"No doubt," the father said; "the inspiration of Botticelli."

"Papa!"

Mr. White chuckled to himself. He was not given to joking: an epigram was not in consonance with his high sententiousness. But instantly he resumed his solemn deportment.

"A picture is as much a part of the world as a human face: why should I not take my inspiration from a picture as well as from a human face?"

"You mean to say he is only a copyist—a plagiarist!" she said, with some indignation.

"Not at all," said he. "All artists have their methods founded more or less on the methods of those who have gone before them. You don't expect an artist to discover for himself an entirely new principle of art, any more than you expect him to paint in pigments of his own invention. Mr. Lemuel has been a diligent student of Botticelli—that is all."

This strange talk amidst the awful loneliness and grandeur of Glen-Sloich! They were idly walking along the rough road: far above them rose the giant slopes of the mountains retreating into heavy masses of cloud that were moved by the currents of the morning wind. It was a gray day; and the fresh-water lake here was of a leaden hue, and the browns and greens of the mountain-side were dark and intense. There was no sign of human life or habitation; there was no bird singing; the deer was far away in the unknown valleys above them, hidden by the mystic cloud phantoms. There was an odor of sweet-gale in the air. The only sound was the murmuring of the streams that were pouring down through these vast solitudes to the sea.

And now they reached a spot from whence, on turning,

they caught sight of the broad plain of the Atlantic—all wind-swept and white. And the sky was dark and low down, though at one place the clouds had parted, and there was a glimmer of blue as narrow and keen as the edge of a knife. But there were showers about; for Iona was invisible, and Staffa was faintly gray through the passing rain; and Ulva was almost black as the storm approached in its gloom. Botticelli! Those men now in that small lugsailed boat—far away off the point of Gometra—a tiny dark thing, apparently lost every second or so amidst the white Atlantic surge, and wrestling hard with the driving wind and sea to reach the thundering and foam-filled caverns of Staffa—they were not thinking much of Botticelli. Keith Macleod was in that boat. The evening before Miss White had expressed some light wish about some trifle or other, but had laughingly said that she must wait till she got back to the region of shops. Unknown to her, Macleod had set off to intercept the steamer: and he would go on board and get hold of the steward; and would the steward be so kind as to hunt about in Oban to see if that trifle could not be found? Macleod would not intrust so important a message to any one else: he would himself go out to meet the *Pioneer*.

“The sky is becoming very dark,” Mr. White said; “we had better go back, Gerty.”

But before they had gone far the first heavy drops were beginning to fall, and they were glad to run for refuge to some great gray boulders which lay in the moist moorland at the foot of the mountain-slopes. In the lee of these rocks they were in comparative safety; and they waited patiently until the gale of wind and rain should pass over. And what were these strange objects that appeared in the gray mists far along the valley? She touched her father's arm—she did not speak; it was her first sight of a herd of red-deer; and as the deer had doubtless been startled by a shepherd or his dog, they were making across the glen at a good speed. First came the hinds, running almost in Indian file, and then, with a longer stride, came one or two stags, their antlered heads high in the air, as though they were listening for sounds behind them and sniffing the wind in front of them at the same time. But so far away were they that they were only blurred objects passing through the rain-mists; they passed across like swift ghosts; there was no sound heard at all. And then the rain ceased, and the air grew warm around them. They came out from the shadow of the

rock—behold ! a blaze of hot sun on the moist moors, with a sudden odor of bracken, and young heather, and sweet-gale all about them. And the sandy road quickly grew dry again ; and the heavens opened ; and there was a flood of sunlight falling on that rushing and breezy Atlantic. They walked back to Dare.

“ Tuesday, then, shall we say, pappy ? ” she remarked, just before entering.

“ Very well.”

“ And we are going to see some friends in Aberdeen.”

“ Very well.”

After this Miss White became a great deal more cheerful ; and she was very complaisant to them all at luncheon. And quite by accident she asked Macleod, who had returned by this time, whether they talked Scotch in Aberdeen.

“ Because, you know,” said she, “ one should always be learning on one’s travels ; and many a time I have heard people disputing about the pronunciation of the Scotch ; and one ought to be able to read Burns with a proper accent. Now, you have no Scotch at all here ; you don’t say ‘ my dawtie,’ and ‘ ben the hoose,’ and ‘ ’twixt the gloaming and the mirk.’ ”

“ Oh no,” said he, “ we have none of the Scotch at all, except among those who have been for a time to Glasgow or Greenock ; and our own language, the Gaelic, is unknown to strangers ; and our way of speaking English—that is only made a thing to laugh at. And yet I do not laugh at all at the blunders of our poor people in a strange tongue. You may laugh at us for our way of speaking English—the accent of it ; but it is not fair to laugh at the poor people when they will be making mistakes among the verbs. Did you ever hear of the poor Highlander who was asked how he had been employing himself, and, after a long time, he said, ‘ I wass for two years a herring fish and I wass for four months or three months a broke stone on the road ? ’ Perhaps the Highlanders are not very clever at picking up another language ; but all the same that did not prevent their going to all parts of the world and fighting the battles of other people. And do you know that in Canada there are descendants of the Highlanders who went there in the last century ; and they are proud of their name and their history ; and they have swords that were used at Falkirk and Culloden : but these Macnabs and Mackays, and Camerons, they speak only French ! But I think, if they have High

land blood in them, and if they were to hear the '*Faille Phrionsa !*' played on the pipes, they would recognize that language. And why were you asking about Aberdeen?"

"That is not a Highland but a Scotch way of answering my question," said she, smiling.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said he, hastily; "but indeed I have never been to Aberdeen, and I do not know what it is they speak there; but I should say it was likely to be a mixture of Scotch and English, such as all the big towns have. I do not think it is a Highland place, like Inverness."

"Now I will answer your question," said she. "I asked you because papa and I propose to go there before returning to England." How quickly the light fell from his face! "The fact is, we have some friends there."

There was silence. They all felt that it was for Macleod to speak; and they may have been guessing as to what was passing in his mind. But to their surprise he said, in almost a gay fashion,—

"Ah, well, you know they accuse us Highland folk of being rather too importunate as hosts; but we will try not to harass you; and if you have friends in Aberdeen, it would not be fair to beg of you to leave them aside this time. But surely you are not thinking of going to Aberdeen yet, when it is many a place you have yet to see about here? I was to take you in the *Umpire* to Skye; and we had many a talk about the Lewis, too."

"Thank you very much," said she, demurely. "I am sure you have been most kind to us; but—the fact is—I think we must leave on Tuesday."

"On Tuesday!" said he; but it was only for an instant that he winced. Again he roused himself—for he was talking in the presence of his mother and the cousin Janet—"You have not been quite fair to us," said he cheerfully; "you have not given yourself time to make our acquaintance. Are you determined to go away as you came—the Fionaghal? But then, you know, Fionaghal came and stayed among us before she began to write her songs about the Western Isles; and the next time you come that must be for a longer time, and you will get to know us all better, and we will not frighten you any more by taking you on the sea at night or into the cathedral ruins. Ah!" said he, with a smile lighting up his face—but it was a constrained gayety altogether. "Do I know now why you are hurrying away so soon? You

want to avoid that trip in the *Umpire* to the island where I used to think I would like my grave to be—”

“Keith!” said Lady Macleod, with a frown. “How can you repeat that nonsense! Miss White will think you are mad!”

“It was only an old fancy, mother,” said he, gently. “And we were thinking of going out to one of the Treshnish islands, anyway. Surely it is a harmless thing that a man should choose out the place of his own grave, so long as he does not want to be put into it too soon.”

“It will be time for you to speak of such things thirty years hence,” said Lady Macleod.

“Thirty years is a long time,” said he; and then he added, lightly, “but if we do not go out to the Treshnish islands, we must go somewhere else before the Tuesday; and would you go round to Loch Sunart now? or shall we drive you to-morrow to see Glen More and Loch Buy? And you must not leave Mull without visting our beautiful town—and capital—that is Tobermory.”

Every one was quite surprised and pleased to find Macleod taking the sudden departure of his sweetheart in this fashion; it showed that he had abundant confidence in the future. And if Miss White had her own thoughts about the matter, it was at all events satisfactory to her that outwardly Macleod and she were parting on good terms.

But that evening he happened to find her alone for a few moments; and all the forced cheerfulness had left his eyes, and there was a dark look there—of hopeless anxiety and pain.

“I do not wish to force you, Gerty—to persecute you,” said he. “You are our guest. But before you go away, cannot you give me one definite word of promise and hope—only one word?”

“I am quite sure you don’t want to persecute me, Keith,” said she, “but you should remember there is a long time of waiting before us, and there will be plenty of opportunity for explaining and arranging everything when we have leisure to write—”

“To write!” he exclaimed. “But I am coming to see you, Gerty! Do you think I could go through another series of long months, with only those letters, and letters, and letters to break one’s heart over? I could not do it again, Gerty. And when you have visited your friends in Aberdeen, I am coming to London.”

"Why, Keith, there is the shooting!"

"I do not think I shall try the shooting this year—it is an anxiety—I cannot have patience with it. I am coming to London, Gerty."

"Oh, very well, Keith," said she, with an affectation of cheerful content; "then there is no use in our taking a solemn good-by just now—is there? You know how I hate scenes. And we shall part very good friends, shall we not? And when you come to London, we shall make up all our little differences, and have everything on a clear understanding. Is it a bargain? Here comes your cousin Janet—now show her that we are good friends, Keith! And, for goodness' sake, don't say that you mean to give up your shooting this year, or she will wonder what I have made of you. Give up your shooting! Why, a woman would as soon give up her right of being incomprehensible and whimsical and capricious—her right of teasing people, as I very much fear I have been teasing you, Keith. But it will be all set right when you come to London."

And from that moment to the moment of her departure Miss White seemed to breathe more freely, and she took less care to avoid Keith Macleod in her daily walks and ways. There was at last quite a good understanding between them, as the people around imagined.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AFRAID.

BUT the very first thing she did on reaching home again was to write to Macleod begging him to postpone his visit to London. What was the use? The company of which she formed a part was most probably going on an autumn tour; she was personally very busy. Surely it would not much interest him to be present at the production of a new piece in Liverpool?

And then she pointed out to him that, as she had her duties and occupations, so ought he to have. It was monstrous his thought of foregoing the shooting that year. Why, if he wanted some additional motive, what did he say to pre-

serving as much grouse-plumage as would trim a cloak for her? It was a great pity that the skins of so beautiful a bird should be thrown away. And she desired him to present her kind regards to Lady Macleod and to Miss Macleod; and to thank them both for their great kindness.

Immediately after writing that letter Miss White seemed to grow very light-hearted indeed, and she laughed and chatted with Carry, and was exceedingly affectionate toward her sister.

"And what do you think of your own home now, Gerty?" said Miss Carry, who had been making some small experiments in arrangement.

"You mean, after my being among the savages?" said she. "Ah, it is too true, Carry. I have seen them in their war-paint; and I have shuddered at their spears; and I have made voyages in their canoes. But it is worth while going anywhere and doing anything in order to come back and experience such a sense of relief and quiet. Oh, what a delicious cushion! where did you get it, Carry?"

She sank back in the rocking-chair out on this shaded veranda. It was the slumbering noontide of a July day the foliage above and about the Regent's Canal hung motionless in the still sunlight; and there was a perfume of roses in the air. Here, at last, was repose. She had said that her notion of happiness was to be let alone; and—now that she had despatched that forbidding letter—she would be able to enjoy a quiet and languor free from care.

"Aha, Gerty, don't you know?" said the younger sister. "Well, I suppose, you poor creature, you don't know—you have been among the tigers and crocodiles so long. That cushion is a present from Mr. Lemuel to me—to me, mind, not to you—and he brought it all the way from Damascus some years ago. Oh, Gerty, if I was only three years older, shouldn't I like to be your rival, and have a fight with you for him!"

"I don't know what you mean," said the elder sister, sharply.

"Oh, don't you! Poor, innocent thing! Well, I am not going to quarrel with you this time, for at last you are showing some sense. How you ever could have thought of Mr. Howson, or Mr. Brook, or you know whom—I never could imagine; but here is some one now whom people have heard of—some one with fame like yourself—who will understand you. Oh Gerty, hasn't he lovely eyes?"

"Like a gazelle," said the other. "You know what Mr. ———said—that he never met the appealing look of Mr. Lemuel's eyes without feeling in his pockets for a biscuit."

"He wouldn't say anything like that about you, Gerty," Carry said reproachfully.

"Who wouldn't?"

"Mr. Lemuel."

"Oh, Carry, don't you understand that I am so glad to be allowed to talk nonsense? I have been all strung up lately—like the string of a violin. Everything *au grand sérieux* I want to be idle, and to chat, and to talk nonsense. Where did you get that bunch of stephanotis?"

"Mr. Lemuel brought it last evening. He knew you were coming home to-day. Oh Gerty, do you know I have seen your portrait, though it isn't finished yet; and you look—you look like an inspired prophetess. I never saw anything so lovely!"

"Indeed!" said Miss White, with a smile; but she was pleased.

"When the public see that, they will know what you are really like, Gerty—instead of buying your photograph in a shop from a collection of ballet-dancers and circus women. That is where you ought to be—in the Royal Academy: not in a shop-window with any mountebank. Oh, Gerty, do you know who is your latest rival in the stationers' windows? The woman who dresses herself as a mermaid and swims in a transparent tank, below water—Fin-fin they call her. I suppose you have not been reading the newspapers?"

"Not much."

"There is a fine collection for you upstairs. And there is an article about you in the *Islington Young Men's Improvement Association*. It is signed *Trismegistus*. Oh, it is beautiful, Gerty—quite full of poetry! It says you are an enchantress striking the rockiest heart, and a well of pure emotion springs up. It says you have the beauty of Mrs. Siddons and the genius of Rachel."

"Dear me!"

"Ah, you don't half believe in yourself, Gerty," said the younger sister, with a critical air. "It is the weak point about you. You depreciate yourself, and you make light of other people's belief in you. However, you can't go against your own genius. That is too strong for you. As soon as you get on the stage, then you forget to laugh at yourself."

"Really, Carry, has papa been giving you a lecture about me?"

"Oh, laugh away? but you know it is true. And a woman like you—you were going to throw yourself away on a——"

"Carry! There are some things that are better not talked about," said Gertrude White, curtly, as she rose and went indoors.

Miss White betook herself to her professional and domestic duties with much alacrity and content, for she believed that by her skill as a letter-writer she could easily ward off the importunities of her too passionate lover. It is true that at times, and in despite of her playful evasion, she was visited by a strange dread. However far away, the cry of a strong man in his agony had something terrible in it. And what was this he wrote to her in simple and calm words?—

"Are our paths diverging, Gerty? and if that is so, what will be the end of it for me and for you? Are you going away from me? After all that has passed, are we to be separated in the future, and you will go one way and I must go the other way, with all the world between us, so that I shall never see you again? Why will you not speak? You hint of lingering doubts and hesitations. Why have you not the courage to be true to yourself—to be true to your woman's heart—to take your life in your own hands, and shape it so that it shall be worthy of you?"

Well, she did speak in answer to this piteous prayer. She was a skilful letter-writer:

"It may seem very ungrateful in an actress, you know, dear Keith, to contest the truth of anything said by Shakespeare; but I don't think, with all humility, there ever was so much nonsense put into so small a space as there is in these lines that everybody quotes at your head—

"To thine own self be true
And it must follow, as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

'Be true to yourself,' people say to you. But surely every one who is conscious of failings, and deceitfulness, and unworthy instincts, would rather try to be a little better than himself? Where else would there be any improvement, in an individual or in society? You have to fight against yourself, instead of blindly yielding to your wish of the moment. I know I, for one, should not like to trust myself. I wish to be better than I am—to be other than I am—and I naturally

look around for help and guidance. Then, you find people recommending you absolutely diverse ways of life, and with all show of authority and reason, too ; and in such an important matter ought not one to consider before making a final choice ? ”

Miss White's studies in mental and moral science, as will readily be perceived, had not been of a profound character. But he did not stay to detect the obvious fallacy of her argument. It was all a maze of words to him. The drowning man does not hear questions addressed to him. He only knows that the waters are closing over him, and there is no arm stretched out to save.

“ I do not know myself for two minutes together,” she wrote. “ What is my present mood, for example ? Why, one of absolute and ungovernable hatred—hatred of the woman who would take my place if I were to retire from the stage. I have been thinking of it all the morning—picturing myself as an unknown nonentity, vanished from the eyes of the public, in a social grave. And I have to listen to people praising the new actress ; and I have to read columns about her in the papers ; and I am unable to say, ‘ Why, all that and more was written and said about me ! ’ What has an actress to show for herself if once she leaves the stage ? People forget her the next day ; no record is kept of her triumphs. A painter, now, who spends years of his life in earnest study—it does not matter to him whether the public applaud or not, whether they forget or not. He has always before him these evidences of his genius ; and among his friends he can choose his fit audience. Even when he is an old man, and listening to the praise of all the young fellows who have caught the taste of the public, he can, at all events, show something of his work as testimony of what he was. But an actress, the moment she leaves the stage, is a snuffed-out candle. She has her stage-dresses to prove that she acted certain parts ; and she may have a scrap-book with cuttings of criticisms from the provincial papers ! You know, dear Keith, all this is very heart-sickening ; and I am quite aware that it will trouble you, as it troubles me, and sometimes makes me ashamed of myself ; but then it is true, and it is better for both of us that it should be known. I could not undertake to be a hypocrite all my life. I must confess to you, whatever be the consequences, that I distinctly made a mistake when I thought it was such an easy thing to adopt a whole new set of opinions and tastes and habits. The old Adam,

as your Scotch ministers would say, keeps coming back, to jog my elbow as an old familiar friend. And you would not have me conceal the fact from you? I know how difficult it will be for you to understand or sympathize with me. You have never been brought up to a profession, every inch of your progress in which you have to contest against rivals; and you don't know how jealous one is of one's position when it is gained. I think I would rather be made an old woman of sixty to-morrow morning, than get up and go out and find my name printed in small letters in the theatre-bills. And if I try to imagine what my feelings would be if I were to retire from the stage, surely that is in your interest as well as mine. How would you like to be tied for life to a person who was continually looking back to her past career with regret, and who was continually looking around her for objects of jealous and envious anger? Really, I try to do my duty by everybody. All the time I was at Castle Dare I tried to picture myself living there, and taking an interest in the fishing, and the farms, and so on; and if I was haunted by the dread that, instead of thinking about the fishing and the farms, I should be thinking of the triumphs of the actress who had taken my place in the attention of the public, I had to recognize the fact. It is wretched and pitiable, no doubt; but look at my training. If you tell me to be true to myself—that is myself. And at all events I feel more contented that I have made a frank confession."

Surely it was a fair and reasonable letter? But the answer that came to it had none of its pleasant common-sense. It was all a wild appeal—a calling on her not to fall away from the resolves she had made—not to yield to those despondent moods. There was but the one way to get rid of her doubts and hesitations; let her at once cast aside the theatre, and all its associations and malign influences, and become his wife, and he would take her by the hand and lead her away from that besetting temptation. Could she forget the day on which she gave him the red rose? She was a woman; she could not forget.

She folded up the letter and held it in her hand, and went into her father's room. There was a certain petulant and irritated look on her face.

"He says he is coming up to London, papa," said she, abruptly.

"I suppose you mean Sir Keith Macleod," said he.

"Well, of course. And can you imagine anything more

provoking—just at present, when we are rehearsing this new play, and when all the time I can afford Mr. Lemuel wants for the portrait? I declare the only time I feel quiet, secure, safe from the interference of anybody, and more especially the worry of the postman, is when I am having that portrait painted; the intense stillness of the studio is delightful, and you have beautiful things all around you. As soon as I open the door, I come out into the world again, with constant vexations and apprehensions all around. Why, I don't know but that at any minute Sir Keith Macleod may not come walking up to the gate!"

"And why should that possibility keep you in terror?" said her father, calmly.

"Well, not in terror," said she, looking down, "but—but anxiety, at least; and a very great deal of anxiety. Because I know he will want explanations, and promises, and I don't know what—just at the time I am most worried and unsettled about everything I mean to do."

Her father regarded her for a second or two.

"Well?" said he.

"Isn't that enough?" she said, with some indignation.

"Oh," said he, coldly, "you have merely come to me to pour out your tale of wrongs. You don't want me to interfere, I suppose. Am I to condole with you?"

"I don't know why you should speak to me like that, at all events," said she.

"Well, I will tell you," he responded, in the same cool, matter of fact way. "When you told me you meant to give up the theatre and marry Sir Keith Macleod, my answer was that you were likely to make a mistake. I thought you were a fool to throw away your position as an actress; but I did not urge the point. I merely left the matter in your own hands. Well, you went your own way. For a time your head was filled with romance—Highland chieftains, and gillies, and red-deer, and baronial halls, and all that stuff; and no doubt you persuaded that young man that you believed in the whole thing fervently, and there was no end to the names you called theatres and everybody connected with them. Not only that, but you must needs drag me up to the Highlands to pay a visit to a number of strangers with whom both you and I lived on terms of apparent hospitality and goodwill, but in reality on terms of very great restraint. Very well. You begin to discover that your romance was a

little bit removed from the actual state of affairs—at least, you say so—”

“I say so!” she exclaimed.

“Hear me out,” the father said, patiently. “I don’t want to offend you, Gerty, but I wish to speak plainly. You have an amazing faculty for making yourself believe anything that suits you. I have not the least doubt but that you have persuaded yourself that the change in your manner toward Keith Macleod was owing to your discovering that their way of life was different from what you expected; or perhaps that you still had a lingering fancy for the stage—anything you like. I say you could make yourself believe anything. But I must point out to you that any acquaintance of yours—an outsider—would probably look on the marked attentions Mr. Lemuel has been paying you; and on your sudden conversion to the art-theories of himself and his friends; and on the revival of your ambitious notions about tragedy—”

“You need say no more,” said she, with her face grown quickly red, and with a certain proud impatience in her look.

“Oh, yes, but I mean to say more,” her father said, quietly, “unless you wish to leave the room. I mean to say this—that when you have persuaded yourself somehow that you would rather reconsider your promise to Sir Keith Macleod—am I right?—that it does seem rather hard that you should grow ill-tempered with him and accuse him of being the author of your troubles and vexations. I am no great friend of his—I disliked his coming here at the outset; but I will say he is a manly young fellow, and I know he would not try to throw the blame of any change in his own sentiments on to some one else. And another thing I mean to say is—that your playing the part of the injured Griselda is not quite becoming, Gerty: at all events, I have no sympathy with it. If you come and tell me frankly that you have grown tired of Macleod, and wish somehow to break your promise to him, then I can advise you.”

“And what would you advise, then,” said she, with equal calmness, “supposing that you choose to throw all the blame on me.”

“I would say that it is a woman’s privilege to be allowed to change her mind; and that the sooner you told him so the better.”

“Very simple!” she said, with a flavor of sarcasm in her tone. “Perhaps you don’t know that man as I know him.”

"Then you *are* afraid of him?"

She was silent.

"These are certainly strange relations between two people who talk of getting married. But, in any case, he cannot suffocate you in a cave, for you live in London; and in London it is only an occasional young man about Shoreditch who smashes his sweetheart with a poker when she proposes to marry somebody else. He might, it is true, summon you for breach of promise; but he would prefer not to be laughed at. Come, come, Gerty, get rid of all this nonsense. Tell him frankly the position, and don't come bothering me with pretended wrongs and injuries."

"Do you think I ought to tell him?" said she, slowly.

"Certainly."

She went away and wrote to Macleod; but she did not wholly explain her position. She only begged once more for time to consider her own feelings. It would be better that he should not come just now to London. And if she were convinced, after honest and earnest questioning of herself, that she had not the courage and strength of mind necessary for the great change in her life she had proposed, would it not be better for his happiness and hers that the confession should be made?

Macleod did not answer that letter, and she grew alarmed. Several days elapsed. One afternoon, coming home from rehearsal, she saw a card lying on the tray on the hall-table.

"Papa," said she, with her face somewhat paler than usual, "Sir Keith Macleod is in London!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CLIMAX.

SHE was alone in the drawing-room. She heard the bell ring, and the sound of some one being let in by the front door. Then there was a man's step in the passage outside. The craven heart grew still with dread.

But it was with a great gentleness that he came forward to her, and took both of her trembling hands, and said,—

"Gerty, you do not think that I have come to be angry with you—not that!"

He could not but see with those anxious, pained, tender eyes of his that she was very pale; and her heart was now beating so fast—after the first shock of fright—that for a second or two she could not answer him. She withdrew her hands. And all this time he was regarding her face with an eager, wistful intensity.

"It is—so strange—for me to see you again," said he, almost in a bewildered way. "The days have been very long without you—I had almost forgotten what you were like. And now—and now—oh, Gerty, you are not angry with me for troubling you?"

She withdrew a step and sat down.

"There is a chair," said she. He did not seem to understand what she meant. He was trying to read her thoughts in her eyes, in her manner, in the pale face; and his earnest gaze did not leave her for a moment.

"I know you must be greatly troubled and worried, Gerty; and—and I tried not to come; but your last letter was like the end of the world for me. I thought everything might go then. But then I said, 'Are you a man, and to be cast down by that? She is bewildered by some passing doubt; her mind is sick for the moment; you must go to her, and recall her, and awake her to herself; and you will see her laugh again!' And so I am here, Gerty; and if I am troubling you at a bad time—well, it is only for a moment or two; and you will not mind that? You and I are so different, Gerty! You are all-perfect. You do not want the sympathy of any one. You are satisfied with your own thinkings; you are a world to yourself. But I cannot live without being in sympathy with you. It is a craving—it is like a fire— Well, I did not come here to talk about myself."

"I am sorry you took so much trouble," she said, in a low voice—and there was a nervous restraint in her manner. "You might have answered my letter, instead."

"Your letter!" he exclaimed. "Why Gerty, I could not talk to the letter. It was not yourself. It was no more part of yourself than a glove. You will forget that letter, and all the letters that ever you wrote; let them go away like the leaves of former autumns that are quite forgotten; and instead of the letters, be yourself—as I see you now—proud-spirited and noble—my beautiful Gerty—my wife!"

He made a step forward and caught her hand. She did not see that there were sudden tears in the imploring eyes. She only knew that this vehemence seemed to suffocate her.

"Keith," said she, and she gently disengaged her hand, "will you sit down, and we can talk over this matter calmly, if you please ; but I think it would have been better if you left us both to explain ourselves in writing. It is difficult to say certain things without giving pain—and you know I don't wish to do that—"

"I know," said he, with an absent look on his face ; and he took the chair she had indicated, and sat down beside her ; and now he was no longer regarding her eyes.

"It is quite true that you and I are different," said she, with a certain resolution in her tone, as if she was determined to get through with a painful task—"very seriously different in everything—in our natures, and habits, and opinions, and all the rest of it. How we ever became acquainted I don't know ; I am afraid it was not a fortunate accident for either of us. Well—"

Here she stopped. She had not prepared any speech ; and she suddenly found herself without a word to say, when words, words, words were all she eagerly wanted in order to cover her retreat. And as for him, he gave her no help. He sat silent—his eyes downcast—a tired and haggard look on his face.

"Well," she resumed, with a violent effort, "I was saying, perhaps we made a mistake in our estimates of each other. That is a very common thing ; and sometimes people find out in time, and sometimes they don't. I am sure you agree with me, Keith ?"

"Oh yes, Gerty," he answered, absently.

"And then—and then—I am quite ready to confess that I may have been mistaken about myself ; and I am afraid you encouraged the mistake. You know, I am quite sure, I am not the heroic person you tried to make me believe I was. I have found myself out, Keith ; and just in time before making a terrible blunder. I am very glad that it is myself I have to blame. I have got very little resolution. 'Unstable as water'—that is the phrase : perhaps I should not like other people to apply it to me ; but I am quite ready to apply it to myself ; for I know it to be true ; and it would be a great pity if any one's life were made miserable through my fault. Of course, I thought for a time that I was a very courageous and resolute person—you flattered me into believing

it ; but I have found myself out since. Don't you understand, Keith ? ”

He gave a sign of assent ; his silence was more embarrassing than any protest or appeal.

“ Oh, I could choose such a wife for you, Keith !—a wife worthy of you—a woman as womanly as you are manly ; and I can think of her being proud to be your wife, and how all the people who came to your house would admire and love her—”

He looked up in a bewildered way.

“ Gerty,” he said, “ I don't quite know what it is you are speaking about. You are speaking as if some strange thing had come between us ; and I was to go one way, and you another, through all the years to come. Why, that is all nonsense ! See ! I can take your hand—that is the hand that gave me the red rose. You said you loved me, then ; you cannot have changed already. I have not changed. What is there that would try to separate us ? Only words, Gerty !—a cloud of words humming round the ears and confusing one. Oh, I have grown heart-sick of them in your letters, Gerty ; until I put the letters away altogether, and I said, ‘ They are no more than the leaves of last autumn : when I see Gerty, and take her hand, all the words will disappear then. ’ Your hand is not made of words, Gerty ; it is warm and kind, and gentle—it is a woman's hand. Do you think words are able to make me let go my grasp of it ? I put them away—I do not hear any more of them. I only know that you are beside me, Gerty ; and I hold your hand ! ”

He was no longer the imploring lover : there was a strange elation, a sort of triumph, in his tone.

“ Why, Gerty, do you know why I have come to London ? It is to carry you off—not with the pipes yelling to drown your screams, as Flora Macdonald's mother was carried off by her lover, but taking you by the hand, and waiting for the smile on your face. That is the way out of all our troubles, Gerty : we shall be plagued with no more words then. Oh, I understand it all, sweetheart—your doubts of yourself, and your thinking about the stage : it is all a return of the old and evil influences that you and I thought had been shaken off forever. Perhaps that was a little mistake ; but no matter. You will shake them off now, Gerty. You will show yourself to have the courage of a woman. It is but one step, and you are free ! Gerty,” said he, with a smile on his face, “ do you know what that is ? ”

He took from his pocket a printed document, and opened it. Certain words there that caught her eye caused her to turn even paler than she had been ; and she would not even touch the paper. He put it back.

“ Are you frightened, sweetheart ? No ! You will take this one step, and you will see how all those fancies and doubts will disappear forever ! Oh, Gerty, when I got this paper into my pocket to-day, and came out into the street, I was laughing to myself ; and a poor woman said, ‘ You are very merry, sir ; will you give a poor old woman a copper ? ’ ‘ Well,’ I said, ‘ here is a sovereign for you, and perhaps you will be merry too ? ’—and I would have given every one a sovereign, if I had had it to give. But do you know what I was laughing at ?—I was laughing to think what Captain Macallum would do when you went on board as my wife. For he put up the flags for you when you were only a visitor coming to Dare ; but when I take you by the hand, Gerty, as you are going along the gangway, and when we get on to the paddle-box, and Captain Macallum comes forward, and when I tell him that you are now my wife, why, he will not know what to do to welcome you ! And Hamish, too—I think Hamish will go mad that day. And then, sweetheart, you will go along to Erraidh, and you will go up to the signal-house on the rocks, and we will fire a cannon to tell the men at Dubh-Artach to look out. And what will be the message you will signal to them, Gerty, with the great white boards ? Will you send them your compliments, which is the English way ? Ah, but I know what they will answer to you. They will answer in the Gaelic ; and this will be the answer that will come to you from the lighthouse—‘ *A hundred thousand welcomes to the young bride !* ’ And you will soon learn the Gaelic, too ; and you will get used to our rough ways : and you will no longer have any fear of the sea. Some day you will get so used to us that you will think the very sea-birds to be your friends, and that they know when you are going away and when you are coming back, and that they know you will not allow any one to shoot at them or steal their eggs in the springtime. But if you would rather not have our rough ways, Gerty, I will go with you wherever you please—did I not say that to you, sweetheart ? There are many fine houses in Essex—I saw them when I went down to Woodford with Major Stuart. And for your sake I would give up the sea altogether ; and I would think no more about boats ; and I would go to Essex

with you if I was never to see one of the sea-birds again. That is what I will do for your sake, Gerty, if you wish; though I thought you would be kind to the poor people around us at Dare, and be proud of their love for you, and get used to our homely ways. But I will go into Essex, if you like, Gerty—so that the sea shall not frighten you; and you will never be asked to go into one of our rough boats any more. It shall be just as you wish, Gerty; whether you want to go away into Essex, or whether you will come away with me to the North, that I will say to Captain Macallum, ‘Captain Macallum, what will you do, now that the English lady has been brave enough to leave her home and her friends to live with us? and what are we to do now to show that we are proud and glad of her coming?’”

Well, tears did gather in her eyes as she listened to this wild, despairing cry, and her hands were working nervously with a book she had taken from the table; but what answer could she make. In self-defence against this vehemence she adopted an injured air.

“Really, Keith,” said, she, in a low voice, “you do not seem to pay any attention to anything I say or write. Surely I have prepared you to understand that my consent to what you propose is quite impossible—for the present, at least? I asked for time to consider.”

“I know—I know,” said he. “You would wait, and let those doubts close in upon you. But here is a way to defeat them all. Sweetheart, why do you not rise and give me your hand, and say ‘Yes?’ There would be no more doubts at all!”

“But surely, Keith, you must understand me when I say that rushing into a marriage in this mad way is a very dangerous thing. You won’t look or listen to anything I suggest. And really—well, I think you should have some little consideration for me—”

He regarded her for a moment with a look almost of wonder; and then he said, hastily,—

“Perhaps you are right, Gerty; I should not have been so selfish. But—but you cannot tell how I have suffered—all through the night-time, thinking and thinking—and saying to myself that surely you could not be going away from me—and in the morning, oh! the emptiness of all the sea and the sky, and you not there to be asked whether you would go out to Colonsay, or round to Loch Scridain, or go to see the rock-pigeons fly out of the caves. It is not a long

time since you were with us Gerty; but to me it seems longer than half a dozen of winters; for in the winter I said to myself, 'Ah, well, she is now working off the term of her imprisonment in the theatre; and when the days get long again, and the blue skies come again, she will use the first of her freedom to come and see the sea-birds about Dare.' But this last time, Gerty—well, I had strange doubts and misgivings; and sometimes I dreamed in the night-time that you were going away from me altogether—on board a ship—and I called to you and you would not even turn your head. Oh, Gerty, I can see you now as you were then—your head turned partly aside; and strangers round you; and the ship was going farther and farther away; and if I jumped into the sea, how could I overtake you? But at least the waves would come over me, and I should have forgetfulness."

"Yes, but you seem to think that my letters to you had no meaning whatever," said she, almost petulantly. "Surely I tried to explain clearly enough what our relative positions were?"

"You had got back to the influence of the theatre, Gerty—I would not believe the things you wrote. I said, 'You will go now and rescue her from herself. She is only a girl; she is timid; she believes the foolish things that are said by the people around her.' And then, do you know, sweetheart," said he, with a sad smile on his face, "I thought if I were to go and get this paper, and suddenly show it to you—well, it is not the old romantic way, but I thought you would frankly say 'Yes!' and have an end of all this pain. Why, Gerty, you have been many a romantic heroine in the theatre; and you know they are not long in making up their minds. And the heroines in our old songs, too: do you know the song of Lizzie Lindsay, who 'kilted her coats o' green satin,' and was off to the Highlands before any one could interfere with her? That is the way to put an end to doubts. Gerty, be a brave woman! Be worthy of yourself! Sweetheart, have you the courage now to 'kilt your coats o' green satin?' And I know that in the Highlands you will have as proud a welcome as ever Lord Ronald Macdonald gave his bride from the South."

Then the strange smile went away from his face.

"I am tiring you, Gerty," said he.

"Well, you are very much excited, Keith," said she; "and you won't listen to what I have to say. I think your

coming to London was a mistake. You are giving both of us a great deal of pain ; and, as far as I can see, to no purpose. We could much better have arrived at a proper notion of each other's feelings by writing ; and the matter is so serious as to require consideration. If it is the business of a heroine to plunge two people into lifelong misery, without thinking twice about it, then I am not a heroine. Her 'coats o' green satin !'—I should like to know what was the end of that story. Now really, dear Keith, you must bear with me if I say that I have a little more prudence than you, and I must put a check on your headstrong wishes. Now I know there is no use in our continuing this conversation: you are too anxious and eager to mind anything I say. I will write to you."

"Gerty," said he, slowly, "I know you are not a selfish or cruel woman ; and I do not think you would willingly pain any one. But if you came to me and said, 'Answer my question, for it is a question of life or death to me,' I should not answer that I would write a letter to you."

"You may call me selfish, if you like," said she, with some show of temper, "but I tell you once for all that I cannot bear the fatigue of interviews such as this, and I think it was very inconsiderate of you to force it on me. And as for answering a question, the position we are in is not to be explained with a 'Yes' or a 'No'—it is mere romance and folly to speak of people running away and getting married ; for I suppose that is what you mean. I will write to you if you like, and give you every explanation in my power. But I don't think we shall arrive at any better understanding by your accusing me of selfishness or cruelty."

"Gerty !"

"And if it comes to that," she continued, with a flush of angry daring in her face, "perhaps I could bring a similar charge against you, with some better show of reason."

"That I was ever selfish or cruel as regards you !" said he, with a vague wonder, as if he had not heard aright.

"Shall I tell you, then," said she, "as you seem bent on recriminations ? Perhaps you thought I did not understand ?—that I was too frightened to understand ? Oh, I knew very well !"

"I don't know what you mean !" said he, in absolute bewilderment.

"What !—not the night we were caught in the storm in crossing to Iona ?—and when I clung to your arm, you shook

me off, so that you should be free to strike for yourself if we were thrown into the water? Oh, I don't blame you! It was only natural. But I think you should be cautious in accusing others of selfishness."

For a moment he stood looking at her, with something like fear in his eyes—fear and horror, and a doubt as to whether this thing was possible; and then came the hopeless cry of a breaking heart,—

"Oh God, Gerty! I thought you loved me—and you believed *that*!"

CHAPTER XL.

DREAMS.

THIS long and terrible night: will it never end? Or will not life itself go out, and let the sufferer have rest? The slow and sleepless hours toil through the darkness; and there is a ticking of a clock in the hushed room; and this agony of pain still throbbing and throbbing in the breaking heart. And then, as the pale dawn shows gray in the windows, the anguish of despair follows him even into the wan realms of sleep, and there are wild visions rising before the sick brain. Strange visions they are; the confused and seething phantasmagoria of a shattered life; himself regarding himself as another figure, and beginning to pity this poor wretch who is not permitted to die. "Poor wretch—poor wretch!" he says to himself. "Did they use to call you Macleod; and what is it that has brought you to this?"

* * * * *

See now! He lays his head down on the warm heather, on this beautiful summer day, and the seas are all blue around him; and the sun is shining on the white sands of Iona. Far below, the men are singing "*Fhir a bhata*," and the sea birds are softly calling. But suddenly there is a horror in his brain, and the day grows black, for an adder has stung him!—it is *Rìghinn*—the Princess—the Queen of Snakes. Oh why does she laugh, and look at him so with that clear, cruel look? He would rather not go into this still house where the lidless-eyed creatures are lying in their

awful sleep. Why does she laugh? Is it a matter for laughing that a man should be stung by an adder, and all his life grow black around him? For it is then that they put him in a grave; and she—she stands with her foot on it! There is moonlight around; and the jackdaws are wheeling overhead; our voices sound hollow in these dark ruins. But you can hear this, sweetheart: shall I whisper it to you? "*You are standing on the grave of Macleod.*"

* . * * * *

Lo! the grave opens! Why, Hamish, it was no grave at all, but only the long winter; and now we are all looking at a strange thing away in the south, for who ever saw all the beautiful flags before that are fluttering there in the summer wind? Oh, sweetheart!—your hand—give me your small, warm, white hand! See! we will go up the steep path by the rocks; and here is the small white house; and have you never seen so great a telescope before? And is it all a haze of heat over the sea; or can you make out the quivering phantom of the lighthouse—the small gray thing out at the edge of the world? Look! they are signalling now; they know you are here; come out, quick! to the great white boards; and we will send them over a message—and you will see that they will send back a thousand welcomes to the young bride. Our ways are poor; we have no satin bowers to show you, as the old songs say—but do you know who are coming to wait on you? The beautiful women out of the old songs are coming to be your handmaidens: I have asked them—I saw them in many dreams—I spoke gently to them, and they are coming. Do you see them? There is the bonnie Lizzie Lindsay, who kilted her coats o' green satin to be off with young Macdonald; and Burd Helen—she will come to you pale and beautiful; and proud Lady Maisry, that was burned for her true love's sake; and Mary Scott of Yarrow, that set all men's hearts aflame. See, they will take you by the hand. They are the Queen's Maries. There is no other grandeur at Castle Dare.

* * * * *

Is this Macleod? They used to say that Macleod was a man! They used to say he had not much fear of anything; but this is only a poor trembling boy, a coward trembling at everything, and going away to London with a lie on his lips. And they know how Sholto Macleod died, and how Roderick Macleod died, and Ronald, and Duncan the Fair-haired, and Hector, but the last of them—this poor wretch

—what will they say of him? “Oh, he died for the love of a woman!” She struck him in the heart; and he could not strike back, for she was a woman. Ah, but if it was a man now! They say the Macleods are all become sheep; and their courage has gone; and if they were to grasp even a Rose-leaf they could not crush it, It is dangerous to say that; do not trust to it. Oh, it is you, you poor fool in the newspaper, who are whirling along behind the boat? Does the swivel work? Are the sharks after you? Do you hear them behind you cleaving the water? The men of Dubh-Artach will have a good laugh when we whisk you past. What! you beg for mercy?—come out, then, you poor devil! Here is a tarpaulin for you. Give him a glass of whiskey, John Cameron. And so you know about theatres; and perhaps you have ambition, too; and there is nothing in the world so fine as people clapping their hands? But you—even you—if I were to take you over in the dark, and the storm came on, you would not think that I thrust you aside to look after myself? You are a stranger; you are helpless in boats: do you think I would thrust you aside? It was not fair—oh, it was not fair? If she wished to kill my heart, there were other things to say than that. Why, sweetheart, don’t you know that I got the little English boy out of the water; and you think I would let you drown! If we were both drowning now, do you know what I should do? I should laugh, and say, “Sweetheart, sweetheart, if we were not to be together in life, we are now in death, and that is enough for me.”

* * * * *

What is the slow sad sound that one hears? The grave is on the lonely island; there is no one left on the island now; there is nothing but the grave. “*Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery.*” Oh no, not that! That is all over; the misery is over, and there is peace. This is the sound of the sea-birds, and the wind coming over the seas, and the waves on the rocks. Or is it Donald, in the boat going back to the land? The people have their heads bent; it is a Lament the boy is playing. And how will you play the *Cumhadh na Cloinne* to-night, Donald?—and what will the mother say? It is six sons she has to think of now; and Patrick Mor had but seven dead when he wrote the Lament of the Children. Janet, see to her! Tell her it is no matter now; the peace has come; the misery is over; there is only the quiet sound of the waves.

But you, Donald, come here. Put down your pipes, and listen. Do you remember the English lady who was here in the summer-time ; and your pipes were too loud for her, and were taken away ? She is coming again. She will try to put her foot on my grave. But you will watch for her coming, Donald ; and you will go quickly to Hamish ; and Hamish will go down to the shore and send her back. You are only a boy, Donald ; she would not heed you ; and the ladies at the Castle are too gentle, and would give her fair words ; but Hamish is not afraid of her—he will drive her back ; she shall not put her foot on my grave, for my heart can bear no more pain.

* * * * *

And are you going away—*Rose-leaf—Rose-leaf*—are you sailing away from me on the smooth waters to the South ? I put out my hand to you ; but you are afraid of the hard hands of the Northern people, and you shrink from me. Do you think we would harm you, then, that you tremble so ? The savage days are gone. Come—we will show you the beautiful islands in the summer-time ; and you will take high courage, and become yourself a Macleod ; and all the people will be proud to hear of Fionaghal, the Fair Stranger, who has come to make her home among us. Oh, our hands are gentle enough when it is a *Rose-leaf* they have to touch. There was blood on them in the old days ; we have washed it off now : see—this beautiful red rose you have given me is not afraid of rough hands ! We have no beautiful roses to give you, but we will give you a piece of white heather, and that will secure to you peace and rest and a happy heart all your days. You will not touch it, sweetheart ? Do not be afraid ! There is no adder in it. But if you were to find, now, a white adder, would you know what to do with it ? There was a sweetheart in an old song knew what to do with an adder. Do you know the song ? The young man goes back to his home, and he says to his mother, “ Oh make my bed soon ; for I’m weary, weary hunting, and fain would lie doon.” Why do you turn so pale, sweetheart ? There is the whiteness of a white adder in your cheeks ; and your eyes—there is death in your eyes ! Donald !—Hamish ! help ! help !—her foot is coming near to my grave !—my heart—!”

* * * * *

And so, in a paroxysm of wild terror and pain, he awoke again ; and behold, the ghastly white daylight was in the

room—the cold glare of a day he would fain have never seen ! It was all in a sort of dream that this haggard-faced man dressed, and drank a cup of tea, and got outside into the rain. The rain, and the noise of the cabs, and the gloom of London skies ; these harsh and commonplace things were easier to bear than the dreams of the sick brain. And then, somehow or other, he got his way down to Aldershot, and sought out Norman Ogilvie.

“ Macleod ! ” Ogilvie cried—startled beyond measure by his appearance.

“ I—I wanted to shake hands with you, Ogilvie, before I am going,” said this hollow-eyed man, who seemed to have grown old.

Ogilvie hesitated for a second or two ; and then he said, vehemently,—

“ Well, Macleod, I am not a sentimental chap—but—but—hang it ! it is too bad. And again and again I have thought of writing to you, as your friend, just within the last week or so ; and then I said to myself that tale-bearing never came to any good. But she won’t darken Mrs. Ross’s door again—that I know. Mrs. Ross went straight to her the other day. There is no nonsense about that woman. And when she got to understand that the story was true, she let Miss White know that she considered you to be a friend of hers, and that—well, you know how women give hints—”

“ But I don’t know what you mean, Ogilvie ! ” he cried, quite bewildered. “ Is it a thing for all the world to know ? What story is it—when I knew nothing till yesterday ? ”

“ Well, you know now : I saw by your face a minute ago that she had told you the truth at last,” Ogilvie said. “ Macleod, don’t blame me. When I heard of her being about to be married, I did not believe the story—”

Macleod sprang at him like a tiger, and caught his arm with the grip of a vise.

“ Her getting married ?—to whom ? ”

“ Why, don’t you know ? ” Ogilvie said, with his eyes staring. “ Oh yes, you must know. I see you know ! Why, the look in your face when you came into this room—”

“ Who is the man, Ogilvie ? ”—and there was the sudden hate of ten thousand devils in his eyes.

“ Why, it is that artist fellow—Lemuel. You don’t mean to say she hasn’t told you ? It is the common story ! And Mrs. Ross thought it was only a piece of nonsense—she said they were always making out those stories about act-

resses—but she went to Miss White. And when Miss White could not deny it, Mrs. Ross said there and then they had better let their friendship drop. Macleod, I would have written to you—upon my soul, I would have written to you—but how could I imagine you did not know? And do you really mean to say she has not told you anything of what has been going on recently—what was well known to everybody?”

And this young man spoke in a passion, too; Keith Macleod was his friend. But Macleod himself seemed, with some powerful effort of will, to have got the better of his sudden and fierce hate; he sat down again; he spoke in a low voice, but there was a dark look in his eyes.

“No,” said he, slowly, “she has not told me all about it. Well, she did tell me about a poor creature—a woman-man—a thing of affectation, with his paint-box and his velvet coat, and his furniture. Ogilvie, have you got any brandy?”

Ogilvie rang, and got some brandy, some water, a tumbler, and a wineglass placed on the table. Macleod, with a hand that trembled violently, filled the tumbler half full of brandy.

“And she could not deny the story to Mrs. Ross?” said he, with a strange and hard smile on his face. “It was her modesty. Ah, you don’t know, Ogilvie, what an exalted soul she has. She is full of idealisms. She could not explain all that to Mrs. Ross. I know. And when she found herself too weak to carry out her aspirations, she sought help. Is that it? She would gain assurance and courage from the woman-man?”

He pushed the tumbler away; his hand was still trembling violently.

“I will not touch that Ogilvie,” said he, “for I have not much mastery over myself. I am going away now—I am going back now to the Highlands—oh! you do not know what I have become since I met that woman—a coward and a liar! They wouldn’t have you sit down at the mess-table, Ogilvie, if you were that, would they? I dare not stay in London now. I must run away now—like a hare that is hunted. It would not be good for her or for me that I should stay any longer in London.”

He rose and held out his hand; there was a curious glazed look on his eyes. Ogilvie pressed him back into the chair again.

“You are not going out in this condition, Macleod?—

you don't know what you are doing! Come now, let us be reasonable; let us talk over the thing like men. And I must say, first of all, that I am heartily glad of it, for your sake. It will be a hard twist at first; but, bless you! lots of fellows have had to fight through the same thing, and they come up smiling after it, and you would scarcely know the difference. Don't imagine I am surprised—oh no. I never did believe in that young woman; I thought she was a deuced sight too clever; and when she used to go about humbugging this one and the other with her innocent airs, I said to myself, 'Oh, it's all very well: but *you* know what you are about.' Of course there was no use talking to you. I believe at one time Mrs. Ross was considering the point whether she ought not to give you a hint—seeing that you had met Miss White first at her house—that the young lady was rather clever at flirtation, and that you ought to keep a sharp lookout. But then you would only have blazed up in anger. It was no use talking to you. And then, after all, I said that if you were so bent on marrying her, the chances were that you would have no difficulty, for I thought the bribe of her being called Lady Macleod would be enough for any actress. As for this man Lemuel, no doubt he is a very great man, as people say; but I don't know much about these things myself; and—and—I think it is very plucky of Mrs. Ross to cut off two of her lions at one stroke. It shows she must have taken an uncommon liking for you. So you must cheer up, Macleod. If woman take a fancy to you like that, you'll easily get a better wife than Miss White would have made. Mind you, I don't go back from anything I ever said of her. She is a handsome woman, and no mistake; and I will say that she is the best waltzer that I ever met with in the whole course of my life—without exception. But she's the sort of woman who, if I married her, would want some looking after—I mean, that is my impression. The fact is, Macleod, away there in Mull you have been brought up too much on books and your own imagination. You were ready to believe any pretty woman, with soft English ways, an angel. Well, you have had a twister; but you'll come through it: and you will get to believe, after all, that women are very good creatures just as men are very good creatures, when you get the right sort. Come now, Macleod, pull yourself together! Perhaps I have just as hard an opinion of her conduct towards you as you have yourself. But you know what Tommy Moore, or some fellow like that says—'Though she be not fair to me,

what the devil care I how fair she be?' And if I were you, I would have a drop of brandy—but not half a tumblerful."

But neither Lieutenant Ogilvie's pert common-sense, nor his apt and accurate quotation, nor the proffered brandy, seemed to alter much the mood of this haggard-faced man. He rose.

"I think I am going now," said he, in a low voice. "You won't take it unkindly, Ogilvie, that I don't stop to talk with you: it is a strange story you have told me—I want time to think over it. Good-by!"

"The fact is, Macleod," Ogilvie stammered, as he regarded his friend's face, "I don't like to leave you. Won't you stay and dine with our fellows? or shall I see if I can run up to London with you?"

"No, thank you, Ogilvie," said he. "And have you any message for the mother and Janet?"

"Oh, I hope you will remember me most kindly to them. At least, I will go to the station with you, Macleod."

"Thank you, Ogilvie; but I would rather go alone. Good-by, now."

He shook hands with his friend, in an absent sort of way, and left. But while yet his hand was on the door, he turned and said,—

"Oh, do you remember my gun that has the shot barrel and the rifle barrel?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And would you like to have that, Ogilvie?—we sometimes had it when we were out together."

"Do you think I would take your gun from you, Macleod?" said the other. "And you will soon have plenty of use for it now."

"Good-by, then, Ogilvie," said he, and he left, and went out into the world of rain, and lowering skies, and darkening moors.

And when he went back to Dare it was a wet day also; but he was very cheerful; and he had a friendly word for all whom he met; and he told the mother and Janet that he had got home at last, and meant to go no more a-roving. But that evening, after dinner, when Donald began to play the Lament for the memory of the five sons of Dare, Macleod gave a sort of stifled cry, and there were tears running down his cheeks—which was a strange thing for a man; and he rose and left the hall, just as a woman would have done. And his mother sat there, cold, and pale, and trembling;

but the gentle cousin Janet called out, with a piteous trouble in her eyes,—

“Oh, auntie, have you seen the look on our Keith’s face, ever since he came ashore to-day?”

“I know it, Janet,” said she. “I have seen it. That woman has broken his heart; and he is the last of my six brave lads!”

They could not speak any more now; for Donald had come up the hall; and he was playing the wild, sad wail of the *Cumhadh-na-Cloinne*.

CHAPTER XLI.

A. LAST HOPE.

THOSE sleepless nights of passionate yearning and despair—those days of sullen gloom, broken only by wild cravings for revenge that went through his brain like spasms of fire—these were killing this man. His face grew haggard and gray; his eyes morose and hopeless; he shunned people as if he feared their scrutiny; he brooded over the past in a silence he did not wish to have broken by any human voice. This was no longer Macleod of Dare. It was the wreck of a man—drifting no one knew whither.

And in those dark and morbid reveries there was no longer any bewilderment. He saw clearly how he had been tricked and played with. He understood now the coldness she had shown on coming to Dare; her desire to get away again; her impatience with his appeals; her anxiety that communication between them should be solely by letter. “Yes, yes,” he would say to himself—and sometimes he would laugh aloud in the solitude of the hills, “she was prudent. She was a woman of the world, as Stuart used to say. She would not quite throw me off—she would not be quite frank with me—until she had made sure of the other. And in her trouble of doubt, when she was trying to be better than herself, and anxious to have guidance, *that* was the guide she turned to—the woman-man, the dabbler in paint-boxes, the critic of carpets and wall-papers!”

Sometimes he grew to hate her. She had destroyed the

world for him. She had destroyed his faith in the honesty and honor of womanhood. She had played with him as with a toy—a fancy of the brain—and thrown him aside when something new was presented to her. And when a man is stung by a white adder, does he not turn and stamp with his heel? Is he not bound to crush the creature out of existence, to keep God's earth and the free sunlight sweet and pure?

But then—but then—the beauty of her! In dreams he heard her low, sweet laugh again; he saw the beautiful brown hair; he surrendered to the irresistible witchery of the clear and lovely eyes. What would not a man give for one last, wild kiss of the laughing and half-parted lips? His life? And if that life happened to be a mere broken and useless thing—a hateful thing—would he not gladly and proudly fling it away? One long, lingering, despairing kiss, and then a deep draught of Death's black wine!

One day he was riding down to the fishing-station, when he met John Macintyre, the postman, who handed him a letter, and passed on. Macleod opened this letter with some trepidation, for it was from London; but it was in Norman Ogilvie's handwriting.

"DEAR MACLEOD,—I thought you might like to hear the latest news. I cut the enclosed from a sort of half-sporting, half-theatrical paper our fellows get; no doubt the paragraph is true enough. And I wish it was well over and done with, and she married out of hand; for I know until that is so you will be torturing yourself with all sorts of projects and fancies. Good-by old fellow. I suppose when you offered me the gun, you thought your life had collapsed altogether, and that you would have no further use for anything. But no doubt, after the first shock, you have thought better of that. How are the birds? I hear rather bad accounts from Ross, but then he is always complaining about something.

Yours sincerely,

NORMAN OGILVIE.

And then he unfolded the newspaper cutting which Ogilvie had enclosed. The paragraph of gossip announced that the Piccadilly Theatre would shortly be closed for repairs; but that the projected provincial tour of the company had been abandoned. On the re-opening of the theatre, a play, which was now in preparation, written by Mr. Gregory Lemuel, would be produced. "It is understood," continued the newsman, "that Miss Gertrude White, the young and gifted

actress who has been the chief attraction at the Piccadilly Theatre for two years back, is shortly to be married to Mr. L. Lemuel, the well-known artist ; but the public have no reason to fear the withdrawal from the stage of so popular a favorite, for she has consented to take the chief role in the new play, which is said to be of a tragic nature."

Macleod put the letter and its enclosure into his pocket, and rode on. The hand that held the bridle shook somewhat ; that was all.

He met Hamish.

"Oh, Hamish !" he cried, quite gayly. "Hamish, will you go to the wedding ?"

"What wedding, sir ?" said the old man ; but well he knew. If there was any one blind to what had been going on, that was not Hamish ; and again and again he had in his heart cursed the English traitress who had destroyed his master's peace.

"Why, do you not remember the English lady that was here not so long ago ? And she is going to be married. And would you like to go to the wedding, Hamish !"

He scarcely seemed to know what he was saying in this wild way ; there was a strange look in his eyes, though apparently he was very merry. And this was the first word he had uttered about Gertrude White to any living being at Dare ever since his last return from the South.

Now what was Hamish's answer to this gay invitation ? The Gaelic tongue is almost devoid of those meaningless expletives which, in other languages, express mere annoyance of temper ; when a Highlander swears, he usually swears in English. But the Gaelic curse is a much more solemn and deliberate affair.

"*May her soul dwell in the lowermost hall of perdition !*" —that was the answer that Hamish made ; and there was a blaze of anger in the keen eyes and in the proud and handsome face.

"Oh, yes," continued the old man, in his native tongue, and he spoke rapidly and passionately, "I am only a serving-man, and perhaps a serving-man ought not to speak ; but perhaps sometimes he will speak. And have I not seen it all, Sir Keith ?—and no more of the pink letters coming ; and you going about a changed man, as if there was nothing more in life for you ? And now you ask me if I will go to the wedding ? And what do I say to you, Sir Keith ? I say

this to you—that the woman is not now living who will put that shame on Macleod of Dare ! ”

Macleod regarded the old man's angry vehemence almost indifferently ; he had grown to pay little heed to anything around him.—

“ Oh yes, it is a fine thing for the English lady,” said Hamish, with the same proud fierceness, “ to come here and amuse herself. But she does not know the Mull men yet. Do you think, Sir Keith, that any one of your forefathers would have had this shame put upon him ? I think not. I think he would have said, ‘ Come, lads, here is a proud madam that does not know that a man's will is stronger than a woman's will ; and we will teach her a lesson. And before she has learned that lesson, she will discover that it is not safe to trifle with a Macleod of Dare.’ And you, ask me if I will go to the wedding ! I have known you since you were a child, Sir Keith ; and I put the first gun in your hand ; and I saw you catch your first salmon : it is not right to laugh at an old man.”

“ Laughing at you Hamish ? I gave you an invitation to a wedding ! ”

“ And if I was going to that wedding,” said Hamish, with a return of that fierce light to the gray eyes, “ do you know how I would go to the wedding ? I would take two or three of the young lads with me. We would make a fine party for the wedding. Oh yes, a fine party ! And if the English church is a fine church, can we not take off our caps as well as any one ? But when the pretty madam came in, I would say to myself, ‘ Oh yes, my fine madam, you forgot it was a Macleod you had to deal with, and not a child, and you did not think you would have a visit from two or three of the Mull lads ! ’ ”

“ And what then ? ” Macleod said, with a smile, though this picture of his sweetheart coming into the church as the bride of another man had paled his cheek.

“ And before she had brought that shame on the house of Dare,” said Hamish, excitedly, “ do you not think that I would seize her—that I would seize her with my own hands ? And when the young lads and I had thrust her down into the cabin of the yacht—oh yes, when we had thrust her down and put the hatch over, do you think the proud madam would be quite so proud ? ”

Macleod laughed a loud laugh.

“ Why, Hamish, you want to become a famous person !

You would carry off a popular actress, and have all the country ringing with the exploit ! And would you have a piper, too, to drown her screams—just as Macdonald of Arnadale did when he came with his men to South Uist and carried off Flora Macdonald's mother ? ”

“ And was there ever a better marriage than that—as I have heard many a man of Skye say ? ” Hamish exclaimed, eagerly. “ Oh yes, it is good for a woman to know that a man's will is stronger than a woman's will ! And when we have the fine English madam caged up in the cabin, and we are coming away to the North again, she will not have so many fine airs, I think. And if the will cannot be broken, it is the neck that can be broken ; and better that than that Sir Keith Macleod should have a shame put on him.”

“ Hamish, Hamish, how will you dare to go into the church at Salen next Sunday ? ” Macleod said ; but he was now regarding the old man with a strange curiosity.

“ Men were made before churches were thought of,” Hamish said, curtly ; and then Macleod laughed, and rode on.

The laugh soon died away from his face. Here was the stone bridge on which she used to lean to drop pebbles into the whirling clear water. Was there not some impression even yet of her soft warm arm on the velvet moss ? And what had the voice of the streamlet told him in the days long ago—that the summertime was made for happy lovers ; that she was coming ; that he should take her hand and show her the beautiful islands and the sunlit seas before the darkening skies of the winter came over them. And here was the summer sea ; and moist, warm odors were in the larch-wood ; and out there Ulva was shining green, and there was sunlight on the islands and on the rocks of Erisgeir. But she—where was she ? Perhaps standing before a mirror ; with a dress all of white ; and trying how orange-blossoms would best lie in her soft brown hair. Her arms are uplifted to her head ; she smiles : could not one suddenly seize her now by the waist and bear her off, with the smile changed to a blanched look of fear ? The wild pirates have got her ; the Rose-leaf is crushed in the cruel Northern hands ; at last—at last—what is in the scabbard has been drawn, and declared, and she screams in her terror !

Then he fell to brooding again over Hamish's mad scheme. The fine English church of Hamish's imagination was no doubt a little stone building that a handful of sailors

could carry at a rush. And of course the yacht must needs be close by ; for there was no land in Hamish's mind that was out of sight of the salt-water. And what consideration would this old man have for delicate fancies and studies in moral science ? The fine madam had been chosen to be the bride of Macleod of Dare ; that was enough. If her will would not bend, it would have to be broken ; that was the good old way. Was there ever a happier wife than the Lady of Armadale, who had been carried screaming downstairs in the night-time, and placed in her lover's boat, with the pipes playing a wild pibroch all the time ?

Macleod was in the library that night when Hamish came to him with some papers. And just as the old man was about to leave, Macleod said to him,—

“ Well, that was a pretty story you told me this morning, Hamish, about the carrying off the young English lady. And have you thought any more about it ? ”

“ I have thought enough about it,” Hamish said, in his native tongue.

“ Then perhaps you could tell me, when you start on this fine expedition, how you are going to have the yacht taken to London ? The lads of Mull are very clever, Hamish, I know ; but do you think that any one of them can steer the *Umpire* all the way from Loch-na-Keal to the river Thames ? ”

“ Is it the river Thames ? ” said Hamish, with great contempt. “ And is that all—the river Thames ? Do you know this, Sir Keith, that my cousin Colin Laing, that has a whiskey-shop now in Greenock, has been all over the world, and at China and other places ; and he was the mate of many a big vessel ; and do you think he could not take the *Umpire* from Loch-na-Keal to London ? And I would only have to send a line to him and say, ‘ Colin, it is Sir Keith Macleod himself that will want you to do this ; ’ and then he will leave twenty or thirty shops, ay, fifty and a hundred shops, and think no more of them at all. Oh yes, it is very true what you say Sir Keith. There is no one knows better than I the soundings in Loch Scridain and Loch Tua ; and you have said yourself that there is not a bank or a rock about the islands that I do not know ; but I have not been to London—no, I have not been to London. But is there any great trouble in getting to London ? No, none at all, when we have Colin Laing on board.”

Macleod was apparently making a gay joke of the matter ; but there was an anxious, intense look in his eyes all

the same—even when he was staring absently at the table before him.

“Oh yes, Hamish,” he said, laughing in a constrained manner, “that would be a fine story to tell. And you would become very famous—just as if you were working for fame in a theatre; and all the people would be talking about you. And when you got to London, how would you get through the London streets?”

“It is my cousin who would show me the way: has he not been to London more times than I have been to Stornoway?”

“But the streets of London—they would cover all the ground between here and Loch Scridain; and how would you carry the young lady through them?”

“We would carry her,” said Hamish, curtly.

“With the bagpipes to drown her screams?”

“I would drown her screams myself,” said Hamish, with a sudden savageness; and he added something that Macleod did not hear.

“Do you know that I am a magistrate, Hamish?”

“I know it, Sir Keith.”

“And when you come to me with this proposal, do you know what I should do?”

“I know what the old Macleods of Dare would have done,” said Hamish, proudly, “before they let this shame come on them. And you, Sir Keith—you are a Macleod, too; ay, and the bravest lad that ever was born in Castle Dare! And you will not suffer this thing any longer, Sir Keith; for it is a sore heart I have from the morning till the night; and it is only a serving-man that I am; but sometimes when I will see you going about—and nothing now cared for, but a great trouble on your face—oh, then I say to myself, ‘Hamish, you are an old man, and you have not long to live; but before you die you will teach the fine English madam what it is to bring a shame on Sir Keith Macleod!’”

“Ah, well, good-night now, Hamish; I am tired,” he said; and the old man slowly left.

He was tired—if one might judge by the haggard cheeks and the heavy eyes; but he did not go to sleep. He did not even go to bed. He spent the livelong night, as he had spent too many lately, in nervously pacing to and fro within this hushed chamber; or seated with his arms on the table, and the aching head resting on the clasped hands.

And again those wild visions came to torture him—the product of a sick heart and a bewildered brain; only now there was a new element introduced. This mad project of Hamish's at which he would have laughed in a saner mood, began to intertwist itself with all these passionate longings and these troubled dreams of what might yet be possible to him on earth; and wherever he turned it was suggested to him; and whatever was the craving and desire of the moment, this, and this only, was the way to reach it. For if one were mad with pain, and determined to crush the white adder that had stung one, what better way than to seize the hateful thing and cage it so that it should do no more harm among the sons of men? Or if one were mad because of the love of a beautiful white Princess—and she far away, and dressed in bridal robes: what better way than to take her hand and say, "Quick, quick, to the shore! For the summer seas are waiting for you, and there is a home for the bride far away in the North?" Or if it was only one wild, despairing effort—one last means of trying—to bring her heart back again? Or if there was but the one fierce, captured kiss of those lips no longer laughing at all? Men had ventured more for far less reward, surely? And what remained to him in life but this? There was at least the splendid joy of daring and action!

The hours passed; and sometimes he fell into a troubled sleep as he sat with his head bent on his hands; but then it was only to see those beautiful pictures of her, that made his heart ache all the more. And sometimes he saw her all in sailor-like white and blue, as she was stepping down from the steamer; and sometimes he saw the merry Duchess coming forward through the ballroom, with her saucy eyes and her laughing and parted lips; and sometimes he saw her before a mirror; and again she smiled—but his heart would fain have cried aloud in its anguish. Then again he would start up, and look at the window. Was he impatient for the day?

The lamp still burned in the hushed chamber. With trembling fingers he took out the letter Ogilvie had written to him, and held the slip of printed paper before his bewildered gaze. "The young and gifted actress." She is "shortly to be married." And the new piece that all the world will come to see, as soon as she is returned from her wedding tour, is "of a tragic nature."

* * * * *

Hamish ! Hamish ! do you hear these things ? Do you know what they mean ? Oh, we will have to look sharp if we are to be there in time. Come along, you brave lads ! it is not the first time that a Macleod has carried off a bride. And will she cry, do you think—for we have no pipes to drown her screams ? Ah, but we will manage it another way than that, Hamish ! You have no cunning, you old man ! There will be no scream when the white adder is seized and caged.

* * * * *

But surely no white adder ? Oh, sweetheart, you gave me a red rose ! And do you remember the night in the garden, with the moonlight around us, and the favor you wore next your heart was the badge of the Macleods ? You were not afraid of the Macleods then ; you had no fear of the rude Northern people ; you said they would not crush a pale Rose-leaf. And now—now—see ! I have rescued you ; and those people will persuade you no longer : I have taken you away—you are free ! And will you come up on deck now, and look around on the summer sea ? And shall we put in to some port, and telegraph that the runaway bride is happy enough, and that they will hear of her next from Castle Dare ? Look around, sweetheart : surely you know the old boat. And here is Christina to wait on you ; and Hamish—Hamish will curse you no more—he will be your friend now. Oh, you will make the mother's heart glad at last ! she has not smiled for many a day.

* * * * *

Or is it the proud madam that is below, Hamish ; and she will not speak ; and she sits alone in all her finery ? And what are we to do with her now, then, to break her will ? Do you think she will speak when she is in the midst of the silence of the Northern seas ? Or will they be after us, Hamish ? Oh, that would be a fine chase, indeed ! and we would lead them a fine dance through the Western Isles ; and I think you would try their knowledge of the channels and the banks. And the painter-fellow, Hamish, the woman-man, the dabbler—would he be in the boat behind us ? or would he be down below, in bed in the cabin, with a nurse to attend him ? Come along, then !—but beware of the overfalls of Tiree, you southern men ! Or is it a race for Barra Head ; and who will be at Vatersay first ! There is good fishing-ground on the Sgriobh bhan ; Hamish ; they may as well stop to fish as seek to catch us among our Western

Isles ! See, the dark is coming down ; are these the Monach lights in the north ?—Hamish, Hamish, we are on the rocks ! —and there is no one to help her ! Oh, sweetheart ! sweetheart !—

* * * * *

The brief fit of struggling sleep is over ; he rises and goes to the window ; and now, if he is impatient for the new day, behold ! the new day is here. Oh, see how the wan light of the morning meets the wan face ! It is the face of a man who has been close to Death ; it is the face of a man who is desperate. And if, after the terrible battle of the night, with its uncontrollable yearning and its unbearable pain, the fierce and bitter resolve is taken ?—if there remains but this one last despairing venture for all that made life worth having ? How wildly the drowning man clutches at this or that, so only that he may breathe for yet a moment more ? He knows not what miracle may save him ; he knows not where there is any land ; but only to live—only to breath for another moment—that is his cry. And then, mayhap, amidst the wild whirl of waves, if he were suddenly to catch sight of the shore ; and think that he was getting near to that ; and see awaiting him there a white Princess, with a smile on her lips and a red rose in her outstretched hand. Would he not make one last convulsive effort before the black waters dragged him down ?

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WHITE-WINGED DOVE.

THE mere thought of this action, swift, immediate, impetuous, seemed to give relief to the burning brain. He went outside, and walked down to the shore; all the world was asleep; but the day had broken fair and pleasant, and the sea was calm and blue. Was not that a good omen? After all, then, there was still the wild, glad hope that Fionaghal might come and live in her Northern home: the summer days had not gone forever; they might still find a red rose for her bosom at Castle Dare.

And then he tried to deceive himself. Was not this a mere lover's stratagem. Was not all fair in love as in war? Surely she would forgive him, for the sake of the great love he bore her, and the happiness he would try to bring her all the rest of her life? And no sailor, he would take care, would lay his rough hand on her gentle arm. That was the folly of Hamish. There was no chance, in these days, for a band of Northern pirates to rush into a church and carry off a screaming bride. There were other ways than that—gentler ways; and the victim of the conspiracy, why, she would only laugh in the happy after-time, and be glad that he had succeeded. And meanwhile he rejoiced that so much had to be done. Oh yes, there was plenty to think about now, other than these terrible visions of the night. There was work to do; and the cold sea-air was cooling the fevered brain, so that it all seemed pleasant and easy and glad. There was Colin Laing to be summoned from Greenock, and questioned. The yacht had to be provisioned for a long voyage. He had to prepare the mother and Janet for his going away. And might not Norman Ogilvie find out somehow when the marriage was to be, so that he would know how much time was left him?

But with all this eagerness and haste, he kept whispering to himself counsels of caution and prudence. He dared not awaken her suspicion by professing too much forgiveness or frierdliness. He wrote to her—with what a trembling hand he put down those words, *Dear Gertrude*, on paper, and how wistfully he regarded them!—but the letter was a proud and

cold letter. He said that he had been informed she was about to be married; he wished to ascertain from herself whether that was true. He would not reproach her, either with treachery or deceit; if this was true, passionate words would not be of much avail. But he would prefer to be assured, one way or another, by her own hand. That was the substance of the letter.

And then, the answer! He almost feared she would not write. But when Hamish himself brought that pink envelope to him, how his heart beat! And the old man stood there in silence, and with gloom on his face; was there to be, after all, no act of vengeance on her who had betrayed Macleod of Dare?

These few words seemed to have been written with unsteady fingers. He read them again and again. Surely there was no dark mystery within them.

"DEAR KEITH,—I cannot bear to write to you. I do not know how it has all happened. Forgive me, if you can and forget me. G."

"Oh, Hamish," said he, with a strange laugh, "it is an easy thing to forget that you have been alive? That would be an easy thing, if one were to ask you? But is not Colin Laing coming here to-day?"

"Oh yes, Sir Keith," Hamish said, with his eyes lighting up eagerly; "he will be here with the *Pioneer*, and I will send the boat out for him. Oh yes, and you are wanting to see him, Sir Keith?"

"Why, of course!" Macleod said. "If we are going away on a long voyage, do we not want a good pilot?"

"And we are going, Sir Keith?" the old man said; and there was a look of proud triumph in the keen face.

"Oh, I do not know yet," Macleod said, impatiently. "But you will tell Christina that, if we are going away to the South, we may have lady-visitors come on board, some day or another; and she would be better than a young lass to look after them, and make them comfortable on board. And if there is any clothes or ribbons she may want from Salen, Donald can go over with the pony; and you will not spare any money, Hamish, for I will give you the money."

"Very well, sir."

"And you will not send the boat out to the *Pioneer* till I give you a letter and you will ask the clerk to be so kind

as to post it for me to-night at Oban ; and he must not forget that."

"Very well, sir," said Hamish ; and he left the room, with a determined look about his lips, but with a glad light in his eyes.

This was the second letter that Macleod wrote ; and he had to keep whispering to himself "Caution ! caution !" or he would have broken into some wild appeal to his sweetheart far away.

"DEAR GERTRUDE," he wrote, "I gather from your note that it is true you are going to be married. I had heard some time ago, so your letter was no great shock to me ; and what I have suffered—well, that can be of no interest to you now, and it will do me no good to recall it. As to your message, I would forgive you freely ; but how can I forget ? Can you forget ? Do you remember the red rose ? But that is all over now, I suppose ; and I should not wonder if I were after all, to be able to obey you, and to forget very thoroughly—not that alone, but everything else. For I have been rather ill of late—more through sleeplessness than any other cause, I think ; and they say I must go for a long sea-voyage ; and the mother and Janet both say I should be more at home in the old *Umpire*, with Hamish and Christina, and my own people round me, than in a steamer ; and so I may not hear of you again until you are separated from me forever. But I write now to ask you if you would like your letters returned, and one or two keepsakes, and the photographs. I would not like them to fall into other hands ; and sometimes I feel so sick at heart that I doubt whether I shall ever again get back to Dare. There are some flowers, too ; but I would ask to be allowed to keep them, if you have no objection ; and the sketch of Ulva, that you made on the deck of the *Umpire*, when we were coming back from Iona, I would like to keep that, if you have no objection. And I remain your faithful friend,

"KEITH MACLEOD."

Now, at the moment he was writing this letter, Lady Macleod and her niece were together ; the old lady at her spinning-wheel, the younger one sewing ; and Janet Macleod was saying,—

"Oh, auntie, I am so glad Keith is going away now in the yacht ! and you must not be vexed at all or troubled if he

stays a long time ; for what else can make him well again ? Why, you know that he has not been Keith at all of late,—he is quite another man—I do not think any one would recognize him. And surely there can be no better cure for sleeplessness than the rough work of the yachting ; and you know Keith will take his share, in despite of Hamish ; and if he goes away to the South, they will have watches, and he will take his watch with the others, and his turn at the helm. Oh, you will see the change when he comes back to us ! ”

The old lady's eyes had slowly filled with tears.

“ And do you think it is sleeplessness, Janet,” said she, that is the matter with our Keith ? Ah, but you know better than that, Janet.”

Janet Macleod's face grew suddenly red ; but she said, hastily,—

“ Why, auntie, have I not heard him walking up and down all the night, whether it was in his own room or in the library ? And then he is out before any one is up : oh yes, I know that when you cannot sleep the face grows white and the eyes grow tired. And he has not been himself at all—going away like that from every one, and having nothing to say, and going away by himself over the moors. And it was the night before last he came back from Kinlock, and he was wet through, and he only lay down on the bed, as Hamish told me, and would have slept there all the night, but for Hamish. And do you not think that was to get sleep at last that he had been walking so far, and coming through the shallows of Loch Scridain, too ? Ah, but you will see the difference, auntie, when he comes back on board the *Umpire*, and we will go down to the shore, and we will be glad to see him that day.”

“ Oh yes, Janet,” the old lady said, and the tears were running down her face, “ but you know—you know. And if he had married you, Janet, and stayed at home at Dare, there would have been none of all this trouble. And now—what is there now ? It is the young English lady that has broken his heart ; and he is no longer a son to me, and he is no longer your cousin, Janet ; but a broken-hearted man, that does not care for anything. And you are very kind, Janet ; and you would not say any harm of any one. But I am his mother—I—I—well, if the woman was to come here this day, do you think I would not speak ? It was a bad day for us all that he went away—instead of marrying you, Janet.”

“ But you know that could never have been, auntie,” said

the gentle-eyed cousin, though there was some conscious flush of pride in her cheeks. "I could never have married Keith."

"But why, Janet?"

"You have no right to ask me, auntie. But he and I—we did not care for each other—I mean, we never could have been married. I hope you will not speak about that any more, auntie."

"And some day they will take me, too, away from Dare," said the old dame, and the spinning-wheel was left unheeded; "and I cannot go into the grave with my five brave lads—for where are they all now, Janet?—in Arizona one, in Africa one, and two in the Crimea, and my brave Hector at Koniggratz. But that is not much; I shall be meeting them all together: and do you not think I shall be glad to see them all together again just as it was in the old days; and they will come to meet me; and they will be glad enough to have the mother with them once again. But, Janet, Janet, how can I go to them? What will I say to them when they ask about Keith—about Keith, my Benjamin, my youngest, my handsome lad?"

The old woman was sobbing bitterly; and Janet went to her and put her arms round her, and said,—

"Why, auntie, you must not think of such things. You will send Keith away in low spirits, if you have not a bright face and a smile for him when he goes away."

"But you do not know—you do not know," the old woman said, "what Keith has done for me. The others—oh yes, they were brave lads; and very proud of their name, too; and they would not disgrace their name, wherever they went; and if they died—that is nothing: for they will be together again now, and what harm is there? But Keith, he was the one that did more than any of them; for he stayed at home for my sake; and when other people were talking about this regiment and that regiment, Keith would not tell me what was sore at his heart; and never once did he say, 'Mother, I must go away like the rest,' though it was in his blood to go away. And what have I done now?—and what am I to say to his brothers when they come to ask me? I will say to them, 'Oh yes, he was the handsomest of all my six lads; and he had the proudest heart, too; but I kept him at home—and what came of it all?' Would it not be better now that he was lying buried in the jungle of the Gold Coast, or at Koniggratz, or in the Crimea?"

"Oh, surely not, auntie! Keith will come back to us soon; and when you see him well and strong again, and when you hear his laugh about the house, surely you will not be wishing that he was in his grave? Why, what is the matter with you to-day, auntie?"

"The others did not suffer much, Janet, and to three of them, anyway, it was only a bullet, a cry, and then the death-sleep of a brave man and the grave of a Macleod. But Keith, Janet—he is my youngest—he is nearer to my heart than any of them: do you not see his face?"

"Yes, auntie," Janet Macleod said, in a low voice; "but he will get over that. He will come back to us strong and well."

"Oh yes, he will come back to us strong and well!" said the old lady, almost wildly, and she rose, and her face was pale. "But I think it is a good thing for that woman that my other sons are all away now; for they had quick tempers, those lads; and they would not like to see their brother murdered."

"Murdered, auntie!"

Lady Macleod would have answered in the same wild, passionate way; but at this very moment her son entered. She turned quickly; she almost feared to meet the look of this haggard face. But Keith Macleod said, quite cheerfully,—

"Well now, Janet, and will you go round to-day to look at the *Umpire*? And will you come too, mother? Oh, she is made very smart now; just as if we were all going away to see the Queen."

"I cannot go to-day, Keith," said his mother; and she left the room before he had time to notice that she was strangely excited.

"And I think I will go some other day, Keith," his cousin said, gently, "just before you start, that I may be sure you have not forgotten anything. And, of course, you will take the ladies' cabin, Keith, for yourself; for there is more light in that, and it is farther away from the smell of the cooking in the morning. And how can you be going to-day, Keith, when it is the man from Greenock will be here soon now?"

"Why, I forgot that, Janet," said he, laughing in a nervous way—"I forgot that, though I was talking to Hamish about him only a little while ago. And I think I might as well go out to meet the *Pioneer* myself, if the boat has not

left yet. Is there anything you would like to get from Oban, Janet?"

"No, nothing, thank you, Keith," said she; and then he left; and he was in time to get into the big sailing-boat before it went out to meet the steamer.

This cousin of Hamish, who jumped into the boat when Macleod's letter had been handed up to the clerk, was a little, black-haired Celt, beady-eyed, nervous, but with the affectation of a sailor's bluffness, and he wore rings in his ears. However, when he was got ashore, and taken into the library, Macleod very speedily found out that the man had some fair skill in navigation, and that he had certainly been into a good number of ports in his lifetime. And if one were taking the *Umpire* into the mouth of the Thames, now? Mr. Lang looked doubtfully at the general chart Macleod had; he said he would rather have a special chart, which he could get at Greenock; for there were a great many banks about the mouth of the Thames; and he was not sure that he could remember the channel. And if one wished to go farther up the river, to some anchorage in communication by rail with London? Oh yes, there was Erith. And if one would rather have moorings than an anchorage, so that one might slip away without trouble when the tide and wind were favorable? Oh yes, there was nothing simpler than that. There were many yachts about Erith; and surely the pier-master could get the *Umpire* the loan of moorings. All through Castle Dare it was understood that there was no distinct destination marked down for the *Umpire* on this suddenly-arranged voyage of hers; but all the same Sir Keith Macleod's inquiries went no farther, at present at least, than the river Thames.

There came another letter in dainty pink; and this time there was less trembling in the handwriting, and there was a greater frankness in the wording of the note.

"DEAR KEITH," Miss White wrote, "I would like to have the letters; as for the little trifles you mention, it does not much matter. You have not said that you forgive me; perhaps it is asking too much; but believe me you will find some day it was all for the best. It is better now than later on. I had my fears from the beginning; did not I tell you that I was never sure of myself for a day? and I am sure papa warned me. I cannot make you any requital for the

great generosity and forbearance you show to me now; but I would like to be allowed to remain your friend. G. W."

"P.S.—I am deeply grieved to hear of your being ill, but hope it is only something quite temporary. You could not have decided better than on taking a long sea-voyage. I hope you will have fine weather."

All this was very pleasant. They had got into the region of correspondence again; and Miss White was then mistress of the situation. His answer to her was less cheerful in tone. It ran thus:

"DEAR GERTRUDE,—To-morrow morning I leave Dare. I have made up your letters, etc., in a packet; but as I would like to see Norman Ogilvie before going farther south, it is possible that we may run into the Thames for a day; and so I have taken the packet with me, and, if I see Ogilvie, I will give it to him to put into your hands. And as this may be the last time that I shall ever write to you, I may tell you now there is no one anywhere more earnestly hopeful than I that you may live a long and happy life, not troubled by any thinking of what is past and irrevocable. Yours faithfully,
KEITH MACLEOD."

So there was an end of correspondence. And now came this beautiful morning, with a fine northwesterly breeze blowing, and the *Umpire*, with her mainsail and jib set, and her gray pennon and ensign fluttering in the wind, rocking gently down there at her moorings. It was an auspicious morning; of itself it was enough to cheer up a heartsick man. The white sea-birds were calling; and Ulva was shining green; and the Dutchman's Cap out there was of a pale purple-blue; while away in the south there was a vague silver mist of heat lying all over the Ross of Mull and Iona. And the proud lady of Castle Dare and Janet, and one or two others more stealthily, were walking down to the pier to see Keith Macleod set sail; but Donald was not there—there was no need for Donald or his pipes on board the yacht. Donald was up at the house, and looking at the people going down to the quay, and saying bitterly to himself, "It is no more thought of the pipes, now, that Sir Keith has, ever since the English lady was at Dare; and he thinks I am better at work in looking after the dogs."

Suddenly Macleod stopped, and took out a pencil and wrote something on a card.

"I was sure I had forgotten something, Janet," said he.

"That is the address of Johnny Wickes's mother. We were to sent him up to see her some time before Christmas."

"Before Christmas!" Janet exclaimed; and she looked at him in amazement. "But you are coming back before Christmas, Keith!"

"Oh, well, Janet," said he carelessly, "you know that when one goes away on a voyage it is never certain about your coming back at all, and it is better to leave everything right."

"But you are not going away from us with thoughts like those in your head, surely?" the cousin said. "Why, the man from Greenock says you could go to America in the *Umpire*; and if you could go to America, there will not be much risk in the calmer seas of the South. And you know, Keith, auntie and I don't want you to trouble about writing letters to us; for you will have enough trouble in looking after the yacht; but you will send us a telegram from the various places you put into."

"Oh yes, I will do that," said he somewhat absently. Even the bustle of departure and the brightness of the morning had failed to put color and life into the haggard face and the hopeless eyes.

That was a sorrowful leave-taking at the shore; and Macleod, standing on the deck of the yacht, could see long after they had set sail, that his mother and cousin were still on the small quay watching the *Umpire* so long as she was in sight. Then they rounded the Ross of Mull, and he saw no more of the women of Castle Dare.

And this beautiful white sailed vessel that is going south through the summer seas: surely she is no deadly instrument of vengeance, but only a messenger of peace? Look, now how she has passed through the Sound of Iona; and the white sails are shining in the light; and far away before her, instead of islands with which she is familiar, are other islands—another Colonsay altogether, and Islay, and Jura, and Scarba, all a pale transparent blue. And what will the men on the lonely Dubh-Artach rock think of her as they see her pass by? Why, surely that she looks like a beautiful white dove. It is a summer day; the winds are soft; fly south, then, White Dove, and carry to her this message of tenderness, and entreaty, and peace? Surely the gentle ear will listen to you, before the winter comes and the skies grow dark overhead, and there is no white dove at all, but an angry sea-eagle, with black wings outspread and talons ready

to strike, Oh, what is the sound in the summer air? Is it the singing of the sea-maiden of Colonsay, bewailing still the loss of her lovers in other years? We cannot stay to listen; the winds are fair; fly southward, and still southward, oh you beautiful White Dove, and it is all a message of love and of peace that you will whisper to her ear.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DOVE, OR SEA-EAGLE?

BUT there are no fine visions troubling the mind of Hamish as he stands here by the tiller in eager consultation with Colin Laing, who has a chart outspread before him on the deck. There is pride in the old man's face. He is proud of the performances of the yacht he has sailed for so many years; and proud of himself for having brought her—always subject to the advice of his cousin from Greenock—in safety through the salt sea to the smooth waters of the great river. And, indeed, this is a strange scene for the *Umpire* to find around her in the years of her old age. For instead of the giant cliffs of Gribun and Bourg there is only the thin green line of the Essex coast; and instead of the rushing Atlantic there is the broad smooth surface of this coffee-colored stream, splashed with blue where the ripples catch the reflected light of the sky. There is no longer the solitude of Ulva and Colonsay, or the moaning of the waves round the lonely shores of Fladda, and Staffa, and the Dutchman; but the eager, busy life of the great river—a black steamer puffing and roaring, russet-sailed barges going smoothly with the tide, a tug bearing a large green-hulled Italian ship through the lapping waters, and everywhere a swarming fry of small boats of every description. It is a beautiful summer morning, though there is a pale haze lying along the Essex woods. The old *Umpire*, with the salt foam of the sea incrusting on her bows, is making her first appearance in the Thames.

“And where are we going, Hamish,” says Colin Laing, in the Gaelic, “when we leave this place?”

“When you are told, then you will know,” says Hamish.

“You had enough talk of it last night in the cabin. I

thought you were never coming out of the cabin," says the cousin from Greenock.

"And if I have a master, I obey my master without speaking," Hamish answers.

"Well, it is a strange master you have got. Oh, you do not know about these things, Hamish. Do you know what a gentleman who has a yacht would do when he got into Gravesend as we got in last night? Why, he would go ashore, and have his dinner in a hotel, and drink four or five different kinds of wine, and go to the theatre. But your master, Hamish, what does he do? He stays on board, and sends ashore for time-tables and such things; and what is more than that, he is on deck all night, walking up and down. Oh yes; I heard him walking up and down all night, with the yacht lying at anchor!"

"Sir Keith is not well. When a man is not well he does not act in an ordinary way. But you talk of my master," Hamish answered, proudly. "Well, I will tell you about my master, Colin—that he is a better master than any ten thousand masters that ever were born in Greenock, or in London either. I will not allow any man to say anything against my master."

"I was not saying anything against your master. He is a wiser man than you, Hamish. For he was saying to me last night, 'Now, when I am sending Hamish to such and such places in London, you must go with him, and show him the trains, and cabs, and other things like that.' Oh yes, Hamish, you know how to sail a yacht; but you do not know anything about towns?"

"And who would want to know anything about towns? Are they not full of people who live by telling lies and cheating each other?"

"And do you say that is how I have been able to buy my house at Greenock," said Colin Laing, angrily, "with a garden, and a boathouse, too?"

"I do not know about that," said Hamish; and then he called out some order to one of the men. Macleod was at this moment down in the saloon, seated at the table, with a letter enclosed and addressed lying before him. But surely this was not the same man who had been in these still waters of the Thames in the bygone days—with gay companions around him, and the band playing "A Highland Lad my Love was born," and a beautiful-eyed girl, whom he called Rose-leaf, talking to him in the quiet of the summer noon.

This man had a look in his eyes like that of an animal that has been hunted to death, and is fain to lie down and give itself up to its pursuers in the despair of utter fatigue. He was looking at this letter. The composition of it had cost him only a whole night's agony. And when he sat down and wrote it in the blue-gray dawn, what had he not cast away?

"Oh no," he was saying now to his own conscience, "she will not call it deceiving! She will laugh when it is all over—she will call it a stratagem—she will say that a drowning man will catch at anything. And this is the last effort—but it is only a stratagem: she herself will absolve me, when she laughs and says, 'Oh, how could you have treated the poor theatres so?'"

A loud rattling overhead startled him.

"We must be at Erith," he said to himself; and then, after a pause of a second, he took the letter in his hand. He passed up the companion-way. Perhaps it was the sudden glare of the light around that falsely gave to his eyes the appearance of a man who had been drinking hard; but his voice was clear and precise as he said to Hamish,—

"Now, Hamish, you understand everything I have told you?"

"Oh yes, Sir Keith."

"And you will put away that nonsense from your head; and when you see the English lady that you remember, you will be very respectful to her, for she is a very great friend of mine; and if she is not at the theatre, you will go on to the other address, and Colin Laing will go with you in the cab. And if she comes back in the cab, you and Colin will go outside beside the driver, do you understand? And when you go ashore, you will take John Cameron with you, and you will ask the pier-master about the moorings."

"Oh yes, Sir Keith; have you not told me before?" Hamish said, almost reproachfully.

"You are sure you got everything on board last night?"

"There is nothing more that I can think of, Sir Keith."

"Here is the letter, Hamish."

And so he pledged himself to the last desperate venture.

Not long after that Hamish, and Laing, and John Cameron went in the dingy to the end of Erith pier, and left the boat there; and went along to the head of the pier, and had a talk with the pier-master. Then John Cameron went back, and the other two went on their way to the railway-station.

"And I will tell you this, Hamish," said the little black

Celt, who swaggered a good deal in his walk, "that when you go in the train you will be greatly frightened; for you do not know how strong the engines are, and how they will carry you through the air."

"That is a foolish thing to say," answered Hamish, also speaking in the Gaelic; "for I have seen many pictures of trains; and do you say that the engines are bigger than the engines of the *Pioneer*, or the *Dunara Castle*, or the *Clansman* that goes to Stornoway? Do not talk such nonsense to me. An engine that runs along the road, that is a small matter; but an engine that can take you up the Sound of Sleat, and across the Minch, and all the way to Stornoway, that is an engine to be talked about!"

But nevertheless it was with some inward trepidation that Hamish approached Erith station; and it was with an awe-struck silence that he saw his cousin take tickets at the office; nor did he speak a word when the train came up and they entered and sat down in the carriage. Then the train moved off, and Hamish breathed more freely: what was this to be afraid of?

"Did I not tell you you would be frightened?" Colin Laing said.

"I am not frightened at all," Hamish answered, indignantly.

But as the train began to move more quickly, Hamish's hands, that held firmly by the wooden seat on which he was sitting, tightened and still further tightened their grasp, and his teeth got clinched, while there was an anxious look in his eyes. At length, as the train swung into a good pace, his fear got the better of him, and he called out,—

"Colin, Colin, she's run away?"

And then Colin Laing laughed aloud, and began to assume great airs; and told Hamish that he was no better than a lad kept for herding the sheep, who had never been away from his own home. This familiar air reassured Hamish; and then the train stopping at Abbey Wood proved to him that the engine was still under control.

"Oh yes, Hamish," continued his travelled cousin, "you will open your eyes when you see London; and you will tell all the people when you go back that you have never seen so great a place; but what is London to the cities and the towns and the palaces that I have seen? Did you ever hear of Valparaiso, Hamish? Oh yes, you will live a long time before you will get to Valparaiso! And Rio: why, I have

known mere boys that have been to Rio. And you can sail a yacht very well, Hamish ; and I do not grumble that you would be the master of the yacht, though I know the banks and the channels a little better than you, and it was quite right of you to be the master of the yacht ; but you have not seen what I have seen. And I have been where there are mountains and mountains of gold—”

“Do you take me for a fool, Colin?” said Hamish, with a contemptuous smile.

“Not quite that,” said the other, “but am I not to believe my own eyes?”

“And if there were the great mountains of gold,” said Hamish, “why did you not fill your pockets with the gold? and would not that be better than selling whiskey in Greenock?”

“Yes ; and that shows what an ignorant man you are, Hamish,” said the other, with disdain. “For do you not know that the gold is mixed with quartz and you have got to take the quartz out? But I dare say now you do not know what quartz is ; for it is a very ignorant man you are, although you can sail a yacht. But I do not grumble at all. You are master of your own yacht, just as I am the master of my own shop. But if you were coming into my shop, Hamish, I would say to you, ‘Hamish, you are the master here, and I am not the master ; and you can take a glass of anything that you like.’ That is what people who have travelled all over the world, and seen princes and great cities and palaces, call *politeness*. But how could you know anything about *politeuess*? You have lived only on the west coast of Mull ; and they do not even know how to speak good Gaelic there.”

“That is a lie, Colin !” said Hamish, with decision. “We have better Gaelic there than any other Gaelic that is spoken.”

“Were you ever in Lochaber, Hamish?” |

“No, I was never in Lochaber.” |

“Then do not pretend to give an opinion about the Gaelic—especially to a man who has travelled all over the world, though perhaps he cannot sail a yacht as well as you, Hamish.”

The two cousins soon became friends again, however. And now, as they were approaching London, a strange thing became visible. The blue sky grew more and more obscured.

The whole world seemed to be enveloped in a clear brown haze of smoke.

"Ay, ay," said Hamish, "that is a strange thing."

"What is a strange thing, Hamish?"

"I was reading about it in a book many a time—the great fire that was burning in London for years and years and years, and have they not quite got it out yet, Colin?"

"I do not know what you are talking about, Hamish," said the other, who had not much book-learning, "but I will tell you this, that you may prepare yourself now to open your eyes. Oh yes, London will make you open your eyes wide; though it is nothing to one who has been to Rio, and Shanghai, and Rotterdam, and other places like that."

Now these references to foreign parts only stung Hamish's pride, and when they did arrive at London Bridge he was determined to show no surprise whatever. He stepped into the four-wheeled cab that Colin Laing chartered, just as if four-wheeled cabs were as common as sea-gulls on the shores of Loch-na-Keal. And though his eyes were bewildered and his ears dinned with the wonderful sights and sounds of this great roaring city—that seemed to have the population of all the world pouring through its streets—he would say nothing at all. At last the cab stopped; the two men were opposite the Piccadilly Theatre.

Then Hamish got out and left his cousin with the cab. He ascended the wide steps; he entered the great vestibule; and he had a letter in his hand. The old man had not trembled so much since he was a schoolboy.

"What do you want, my man?" some one said, coming out of the box-office by chance.

Hamish showed the letter.

"I wass to hef an answer, sir if you please, sir, and I will be opliged," said Hamish, who had been enjoined to be very courteous.

"Take it round to the stage entrance," said the man, carelessly.

"Yes, sir, if you please, sir," said Hamish; but he did not understand; and he stood.

The man looked at him; called for some one; a young lad came, and to him was given the letter.

"You may wait here, then," said he to Hamish; "but I think rehearsal is over, and Miss White has most likely gone home."

The man went into the box-office again; Hamish was left

alone there, in the great empty vestibule. The Piccadilly Theatre had seldom seen within its walls a more picturesque figure than this old Highlandman, who stood there with his sailor's cap in his hand, and with a keen excitement in the proud and fine face. There was a watchfulness in the gray eyes like the watchfulness of an eagle. If he twisted his cap rather nervously, and if his heart beat quick, it was not from fear.

Now, when the letter was brought to Miss White, she was standing in one of the wings, laughing and chatting with the stage manager. The laugh went from her face. She grew quite pale.

"Oh, Mr. Cartwright," said she, "do you think I could go down to Erith and be back before six in the evening?"

"Oh yes, why not?" said he carelessly.

But she scarcely heard him. She was still staring at that sheet of paper, with its piteous cry of the sick man. Only to see her once more—to shake hands in token of forgiveness—to say good-by for the last time: what woman with the heart of a woman could resist this despairing prayer?

"Where is the man who brought this letter?" said she.

"In front, miss," said the young lad, "by the box-office."

Very quickly she made her way along the gloomy and empty corridors, and there in the twilit hall she found the gray-haired old sailor, with his cap held humbly in his hands.

"Oh, Hamish," said she, "is Sir Keith so very ill?"

"Is it ill, mem?" said Hamish; and quick tears sprang to the old man's eyes. "He iss more ill than you can think of, mem; it iss another man that he iss now. Ay, ay, who would know him to be Sir Keith Macleod?"

"He wants me to go and see him; and I suppose I have no time to go home first—"

"Here is the list of the trains, mem," said Hamish, eagerly, producing a certain card. "And it iss me and Colin Laing, that's my cousin, mem; and we hef a cab outside; and will you go to the station? Oh, you will not know Sir Keith, mem; there iss no one at all would know my master now."

"Come along, then, Hamish," said she, quickly. "Oh, but he cannot be so ill as that. And the long sea-voyage will pull him round, don't you think?"

"Ay, ay, mem," said Hamish; but he was paying little heed. He called up the cab, and Miss White stepped inside, and he and Colin Laing got on the box.

"Tell him to go quickly," she said to Hamish, "for I must have something instead of luncheon if we have a minute at the station."

And Miss White, as the cab rolled away, felt pleased with herself. It was a brave act.

"It is the least I can do for the sake of my bonny Glenogie," she was saying to herself, quite cheerfully. "And if Mr. Lemuel were to hear of it? Well, he must know that I mean to be mistress of my own conduct. And so the poor Glenogie is really ill. I can do no harm in parting good friends with him. Some men would have made a fuss."

At the station they had ten minutes to wait; and Miss White was able to get the slight refreshment she desired. And although Hamish would fain have kept out of her way—for it was not becoming in a rude sailor to be seen speaking to so fine a lady—she would not allow that.

"And where are you going, Hamish, when you leave the Thames?" she asked, smoothing the fingers of the glove she had just put on again.

"I do not know that, mem," said he.

"I hope Sir Keith won't go to Torquay or any of those languid places. You will go to the Mediterranean, I suppose?"

"Maybe that will be the place, mem," said Hamish.

"Or the Isle of Wight, perhaps," said she, carelessly.

"Ay, ay, mem—the Isle of Wight—that will be a ferry good place, now. There wass a man I wass seeing once in Tobbermorry, and he wass telling me about the castle that the Queen herself will hef on that island. And Mr. Ross, the Queen's piper, he will be living there too.

But, of course, they had to part company when the train came up; and Hamish and Colin Laing got into a third-class carriage together. The cousin from Greenock had been hanging rather in the background; but he had kept his ears open.

"Now, Hamish," said he, in the tongue in which they could both speak freely enough, "I will tell you something; and do not think I am an ignorant man, for I know what is going on. Oh yes. And it is a great danger you are running into."

"What do you mean, Colin?" said Hamish; but he would look out of the window.

"When a gentleman goes away in a yacht, does he take an old woman like Christina with him? Oh no; I think not.

It is not a customary thing. And the ladies' cabin; the ladies' cabin is kept very smart, Hamish. And I think I know who is to have the ladies' cabin?"

"Then you are very clever, Colin," said Hamish, contemptuously. "But it is too clever you are. You think it strange that the young English lady should take that cabin. I will tell you this—that it is not the first time nor the second time that the young English lady has gone for a voyage in the *Umpire*, and in that very cabin too. And I will tell you this, Colin; that it is this very year she had that cabin; and was in Loch Tua, and Loch-na-Keal, and Loch Scridain, and Calgary Bay. And as for Christina—oh, it is much you know about fine ladies in Greenock! I tell you that an English lady cannot go anywhere without some one to attend to her."

"Hamish, do not try to make a fool of me," said Laing angrily. "Do you think a lady would go travelling without any luggage? And she does not know where the *Umpire* is going!"

"Do you know?"

"No."

"Very well, then. It is Sir Keith Macleod who is the master when he is on board the *Umpire*, and where he wants to go the others have to go."

"Oh, do you think that? And do you speak like that to a man who can pay eighty-five pounds a year of rent?"

"No, I do not forget that it is a kindness to me that you are doing, Colin; and to Sir Keith Macleod, too; and he will not forget it. But as for this young lady, or that young lady, what has that to do with it? You know what the bell of Scoon said, "*That which concerns you not, meddle not with.*"

"I shall be glad when I am back in Greenock," said Colin Laing, moodily.

But was not this a fine, fair scene that Miss Gertrude White saw around her when they came in sight of the river and Erith pier?—the flashes of blue on the water, the white-sailed yachts, the russet-sailed barges, and the sunshine shining all along the thin line of the Essex shore. The moment she set foot on the pier she recognized the *Umpire* lying out there, the great white mainsail and jib idly flapping in the summer breeze: but there was no one on deck. And she was not afraid at all; for had he not written in so kindly

a fashion to her ; and was she not doing much for me, too ? ”

“ Will the shock be great ? ” she was thinking to herself. “ I hope my bonnie Glenogic is not so ill as that ; for he always looked like a man. And it is so much better that we should part good friends.”

She turned to Hamish.

“ There is no one on the deck of the yacht, Hamish,” said she.

“ No, mem,” said he, “ the men will be at the end of the pier, mem, in the boat, if you please, mem.”

“ Then you took it for granted I should come back with you ? ” said she, with a pleasant smile.

“ I was thinking you would come to see Sir Keith, mem,” said Hamish, gravely. His manner was very respectful to the fine English lady ; but there was not much of friendliness in his look.

She followed Hamish down the rude wooden steps at the end of the pier ; and there they found the dingy awaiting them, with two men in her. Hamish was very careful of Miss White’s dress as she got into the stern of the boat ; then he and Colin Laing got into the bow ; and the men half paddled and half floated her along to the *Umpire*—the tide having begun to ebb.

And it was with much ceremony, too, that Hamish assisted Miss White to get on board by the little gangway ; and for a second or two she stood on deck and looked around her while the men were securing the dingy. The idlers lounging on Erith pier must have considered that this was an additional feature of interest in the summer picture—the figure of this pretty young lady standing there on the white decks and looking around her with a pleased curiosity. It was some little time since she had been on board the *Umpire*.

Then Hamish turned to her, and said, in the same respectful way,

“ Will you go below, mem, now ? It iss in the saloon that you will find Sir Keith ; and if Christina iss in the way, you will tell her to go away, mem.”

The small gloved hand was laid on the top of the companion, and Miss White carefully went down the wooden steps. And it with a gentleness equal to her own that Hamish shut the little doors after her.

But no sooner had she quite disappeared than the old

man's manner swiftly changed. He caught hold of the companion hatch, jammed it across with a noise that was heard throughout the whole vessel ; and then he sprang to the helm, with the keen gray eyes afire with a wild excitement.

"—— her, we have her now !" he said, between his teeth ; and he called aloud : " Hold the jib to weather there ! Off with the moorings, John Cameron ! —— her, we have her now !—and it is not yet that she has put a shame on Macleod of Dare ! "

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE PRISONER.

THE sudden noise overhead and the hurried trampling of the men on deck were startling enough ; but surely there was nothing to alarm her in the calm and serious face of this man who stood before her. He did not advance to her. He regarded her with a sad tenderness, as if he were looking at one far away. When the beloved dead come back to us in the wonder-halls of sleep, there is no wild joy of meeting : there is something strange. And when they disappear again, there is no surprise : only the dull aching returns to the heart.

" Gertrude," said he, " you are as safe here as ever you were in your mother's arms. No one will harm you."

" What is it ? What do you mean ? " said she, quickly.

She was somewhat bewildered. She had not expected to meet him thus suddenly face to face. And then she became aware that the companion-way by which she had descended into the saloon had grown dark : that was the meaning of the harsh noise.

" I want to go ashore, Keith," said she hurriedly. " Put me on shore. I will speak to you there."

" You cannot go ashore," said he, calmly.

" I don't know what you mean," said she ; and her heart began to beat hurriedly. " I tell you I want to go ashore, Keith. I will speak to you there."

" You cannot go ashore, Gertrude," he repeated. " We have already left Erith. * * * Gerty, Gerty," he continued,

for she was struck dumb with a sudden terror, "don't you understand now? I have stolen you away from yourself. There was but the one thing left: the one way of saving you. And you will forgive me, Gerty, when you understand it all—"

She was gradually recovering from her terror. She did understand it now. And he was not ill at all.

"Oh, you coward! you coward! you coward!" she exclaimed, with a blaze of fury in her eyes. "And I was to confer a kindness on you—a last kindness! But you dare not do this thing! I tell you, you dare not do it! I demand to be put on shore at once! Do you hear me?"

She turned wildly round, as if to seek for some way of escape. The door in the ladies' cabin stood open; the daylight was streaming down into that cheerful little place; there were some flowers on the dressing-table. But the way by which she had descended was barred over and dark.

She faced him again, and her eyes were full of fierce indignation and anger; she drew herself up to her full height; she overwhelmed him with taunts, and reproaches, and scorn. That was a splendid piece of acting, seeing that it had never been rehearsed. He stood unmoved before all this theatrical rage.

"Oh yes, you were proud of your name," she was saying, with bitter emphasis; "and I thought you belonged to a race of gentlemen, to whom lying was unknown. And you were no longer murderous and revengeful; but you can take your revenge on a woman, for all that! And you ask me to come and see you, because you are ill! And you have laid a trap—like a coward!"

"And if I am what you say, Gerty," said he, quite gently, "it is the love of you that has made me that. Oh, you do not know!"

She saw nothing of the lines that pain had written on this man's face; she recognized nothing of the very majesty of grief in the hopeless eyes. He was only her gaoler, her enemy.

"Of course—of course," she said. "It is the woman—it is always the woman who is in fault! That is a manly thing, to put the blame on the woman! And it is a manly thing to take your revenge on a woman! I thought, when a man had a rival, that it was his rival whom he sought out. But you—you kept out of the way—"

He strode forward and caught her by the wrist. There

was a look in his face that for a second terrified her into silence.

"Gerty," said he, "I warn you! Do not mention that man to me—now or at any time; or it will be bad for him and for you!"

She twisted her hand from his grasp.

"How dare you come near me!" she cried.

"I beg your pardon," said he, with an instant return to his former grave gentleness of manner. "I wish to let you know how you are situated, if you will let me, Gerty. I don't wish to justify what I have done, for you would not hear me—just yet. But this I must tell you, that I don't wish to force myself on your society. You will do as you please. There is your cabin; you have occupied it before. If you would like to have this saloon, you can have that too; I mean I shall not come into it unless it pleases you. And there is a bell in your cabin; and if you ring it, Christina will answer."

She heard him out patiently. Her reply was a scornful, perhaps nervous, laugh.

"Why, this is mere folly," she exclaimed. "It is simple madness. I begin to believe that you are really ill, after all; and it is your mind that is affected. Surely you don't know what you are doing?"

"You are angry, Gerty," said he,

But the first blaze of her wrath and indignation had passed away; and now fear was coming uppermost.

"Surely, Keith, you cannot be dreaming of such a mad thing! Oh, it is impossible! It is a joke: it was to frighten me; it was to punish me, perhaps. Well, I have deserved it; but now—now you have succeeded; and you will let me go ashore, farther down the river."

Her tone was altered. She had been watching his face.

"Oh no, Gerty; oh no," he said. "Do you not understand yet? You were everything in the world to me; you were life itself. Without you I had nothing, and the world might just as well come to an end for me. And when I thought you were going away from me, what could I do? I could not reach you by letters, and letters; and how could I know what the people around you were saying to you? Ah, you do not know what I have suffered, Gerty! And always I was saying to myself that if I could get you away from these people, you would remember the time that you gave me the red rose, and all those beautiful days would come

back again, and I would take your hand again, and I would forget altogether about the terrible nights when I saw you beside me and heard you laugh just as in the old times. And I knew there was only the one way left. How could I but try that? I knew you would be angry, but I hoped your anger would go away. And now you are angry, Gerty, and my speaking to you is not of much use—as yet; but I can wait until I see yourself again, as you used to be, in the garden—don't you remember, Gerty?"

Her face was proud, cold, implacable.

"Do I understand you aright: that you have shut me up in this yacht and mean to take me away?"

"Gerty, I have saved you from yourself!"

"Will you be so kind as to tell me where we are going?"

"Why not away back to the Highlands, Gerty?" said he, eagerly. "And then some day when your heart relents, and you forgive me, you will put your hand in mine, and we will walk up the road to Castle Dare. Do you not think they will be glad to see us that day, Gerty?"

She maintained her proud attitude, but she was trembling from head to foot.

"Do you mean to say that until I consent to be your wife I am not to be allowed to leave this yacht?"

"You will consent Gerty!"

"Not if I were to be shut up here for a thousand years!" she exclaimed, with another burst of passion. "Oh, you will pay for this dearly! I thought it was madness—mere folly; but if it is true, you will rue this day! Do you think we are savages here? Do you think we have no law?"

"I do not care for any law," said he, simply. "I can only think of the one thing in the world. If I have not your love, Gerty, what else can I care about?"

"My love!" she exclaimed. "And this is the way to earn it, truly! My love! If you were to keep me shut up for a thousand years, you would never have it! You can have my hatred, if you like, and plenty of it, too!"

"You are angry, Gerty!" was all he said.

"Oh, you do not know with whom you have to deal!" she continued, with the same bitter emphasis. "You terrified me with stories of butchery—the butchery of innocent women and children; and no doubt you thought the stories were fine; and now you too would show you are one of the race by taking revenge on a woman. But if she is only a woman, you have not conquered her yet! Oh, you will find out be-

fore long that we have law in this country, and that it is not to be outraged with impunity. You think you can do as you like, because you are a Highland master, and you have a lot of slaves round you ! ”

“ I am going on deck now, Gerty,” said he, in the same sad and gentle way. “ Shall I send Christina to you ? ”

For an instant she looked bewildered, as if she had not till now comprehended what was going on ; and she said, quite wildly,—

“ Oh no, no, no, Keith ; you don’t mean what you say ! You cannot mean it ! You are only frightening me ! You will put me ashore—and not a word shall pass my lips. We cannot be far down the river, Keith. There are many places where you could put me ashore, and I could get back to London by rail. They won’t know I have ever seen you. Keith, you will put me ashore now ? ”

“ And if I were to put you ashore now, you would go away, Gerty, and I should never see you again—never, and never. And what would that be for you and for me, Gerty ? But now you are here, no one can poison your mind ; you will be angry for a time ; but the brighter days are coming—oh yes, I know that : if I was not sure of that, what would become of me ? It is a good thing to have hope—to look forward to the glad days : that stills the pain at the heart. And now we two are together at last, Gerty ! And if you are angry, the anger will pass away ; and we will go forward together to the glad days.”

She was listening in a sort of vague and stunned amazement. Both her anger and her fear were slowly yielding to the bewilderment of the fact that she was really setting out on a voyage, the end of which neither she nor any one living could know.

“ Ah, Gerty,” said he, regarding her with a strange wistfulness in the sad eyes, “ you do not know what it is to me to see you again ! I have seen you many a time—in dreams ; but you were always far away, and I could not take your hand. And I said to myself that you were not cruel ; that you did not wish any one to suffer pain. And I knew if I could only see you again, and take you away from these people, then your heart would be gentle, and you would think of the time when you gave me the red rose, and we went out in the garden, and all the air round us was so full of gladness that we did not speak at all. Oh yes ; and I said to myself that your true friends were in the North ; and what would

the men at Dubh-Artach not do for you, and Captain Macallum too, when they knew you were coming to live at Dare ; and I was thinking that would be a grand day when you came to live among us ; and there would be dancing, and a good glass of whiskey for every one, and some playing on the pipes that day ! And sometimes I did not know whether there would be more of laughing or of crying when Janet came to meet you. But I will not trouble you any more now, Gerty ; for you are tired, I think ; and I will send Christina to you. And you will soon think that I was not cruel to you when I took you away and saved you from yourself."

She did not answer ; she seemed in a sort of trance. But she was aroused by the entrance of Christina, who came in directly after Macleod left. Miss White stared at this tall white-haired woman, as if uncertain how to address her ; when she spoke, it was in a friendly and persuasive way.

"You have not forgotten me, then, Christina ?"

"No, mem," said the grave Highland woman. She had beautiful, clear, blue-gray eyes, but there was no pity in them.

"I suppose you have no part in this mad freak ?"

The old woman seemed puzzled. She said, with a sort of serious politeness,—

"I do not know, mem. I have not the good English as Hamish."

"But surely you know this," said Miss Gertrude White, with more animation, "that I am here against my will ? You understand that, surely ? That I am being carried away against my will from my own home and my friends ? You know it very well ; but perhaps your master has not told you of the risk you run ? Do you know what that is ? Do you think there are no laws in this country ?"

"Sir Keith he is the master of the boat," said Christina. "Iss there anything now that I can do for you, mem ?"

"Yes," said Miss White, boldly ; "there is. You can help me to get ashore. And you will save your master from being looked on as a madman. And you will save yourselves from being hanged."

"I wass to ask you," said the old Highland woman "when you would be for having the dinner. And Hamish, he wass saying that you will hef the dinner what time you are thinking of ; and will you hef the dinner all by yourself ?"

"I tell you this, woman," said Miss White, with quick anger, "that I will neither eat nor drink so long as I am on

board this yacht! What is the use of this nonsense? I wish to be put on shore. I am getting tired of this folly. I tell you I want to go ashore; and I am going ashore; and it will be the worse for any one who tries to stop me!"

"I do not think you can go ashore, mem," Christina said, somewhat deliberately picking out her English phrases, "for the gig is up at the davits now; and the dingy—you wass not thinking of going ashore by yourself in the dingy? And last night, mem, at a town, we had many things brought on board; and if you would tell me what you would hef for the dinner, there is no one more willing than me. And I hope you will hef very good comfort on board the yacht."

"I can't get it into your head that you are talking nonsense!" said Miss White, angrily. "I tell you I will not go anywhere in this yacht! And what is the use of talking to me about dinner? I tell you I will neither eat nor drink while I am on board this yacht!"

"I think that would be a ferry foolish thing, mem," Christina said, humbly enough; but all the same, the scornful fashion in which this young lady had addressed her had stirred a little of the Highland woman's blood; and she added—still with great apparent humility—"But if you will not eat, they say that iss a ferry good thing for the pride; and there iss not much pride left if one hass nothing to eat, mem."

"I presume that is to be my prison?" said Miss White, haughtily, turning to the smart little stateroom beyond the companion.

"That iss your cabin, mem, if you please, mem," said Christina, who had been instructed in English politeness by her husband.

"Well, now, can you understand this? Go to Sir Keith Macleod, and tell him that I have shut myself up in that cabin; and that I will speak not a word to any one; and I will neither eat nor drink until I am taken on shore. And so, if he wishes to have a murder on his hands, very well! Do you understand that?"

"I will say that to Sir Keith," Christina answered, submissively.

Miss White walked into the cabin and locked herself in. It was an apartment with which she was familiar; but where had they got the white heather? And there were books; but she paid little heed. They would discover they had not broken her spirit yet.

On either side the skylight overhead was open an inch ; and it was nearer to the tiller than the skylight of the saloon. In the absolute stillness of this summer day she heard two men talking. Generally they spoke in the Gaelic, which was of course unintelligible to her ; but sometimes they wandered into English—especially if the name of some English town cropped up—and thus she got hints as to the whereabouts of the *Umpire*.

“ Oh yes, it is a fine big town that town of Gravesend, to be sure, Hamish,” said the one voice, “ and I have no doubt, now, that it will be sending a gentleman to the Houses of Parliament in London, just as Greenock will do. But there is no one you will send from Mull. They do not know much about Mull in the Houses of Parliament.”

“ And they know plenty about ferry much worse places,” said Hamish, proudly. “ And wass you saying there will be anything so beautiful about Greenock ass you will find at Tobbermorry ? ”

“ Tobermory ! ” said the other ; “ There are some trees at Tobermory—oh yes ; and the Mish-nish and the shops—”

“ Yess, and the waterfahl—do not forget the waterfah, Colin ; and there iss better whiskey in Tobbermorry ass you will get in all Greenock, where they will be for mixing it with prandy and other drinks like that ; and at Tobbermorry you will hef a Professor come all the way from Edinburgh and from Oban to gif a lecture on the Gaelic ; but do you think he would gif a lecture in a town like Greenock ? Oh no ; he would not do that ! ”

“ Very well, Hamish ; but it is glad I am that we are going back the way we came.”

“ And me, too, Colin.”

“ And I will not be sorry when I am in Greenock once more.”

“ But you will come with us first of all to Castle Dare, Colin,” was the reply. “ And I know that Lady Macleod herself will be for shaking hands with you, and thanking you that you wass tek the care of the yacht.”

“ I think I will stop at Greenock, Hamish. You know you can take her well on from Greenock. And will you go round the Mull, Hamish, or through the Crinan, do you think now ? ”

“ Oh, I am not afrait to tek her round the Moil ; but there iss the English lady on board ; and it will be smoother for her to go through the Crinan. And it iss ferry glad I will be,

Colin, to see Ardalanish Point again ; for I would rather be going through the Doruis Mohr twenty times ass getting between the banks of this tanned river."

Here they relapsed into their native tongue, and she listened no longer ; but, at all events, she had learned that they were going away to the North. And as her nerves had been somewhat shaken, she began to ask herself what further thing this madman might not do. The old stories he had told her came back with a marvellous distinctness. Would he plunge her into a dungeon and mock her with an empty cup when she was dying of thirst ? Would he chain her to a rock at low-water ; and watch the tide slowly rise ? He professed great gentleness and love for her ; but if the savage nature had broken out at last ! Her fear grew apace. He had shown himself regardless of everything on earth : where would he stop, if she continued to repel him ? And then the thought of her situation—alone ; shut up in this small room ; about to venture forth on the open sea with this ignorant crew—so overcame her that she hastily snatched at the bell on the dressing table and rang it violently. Almost instantly there was a tapping at the door.

"I ask your pardon, mem," she heard Christina say.

She sprang to the door and opened it, and caught the arm of the old woman.

"Christina, Christina !" she said, almost wildly, "you won't let them take me away ? My father will give you hundreds and hundreds of pounds if only you get me ashore ! Just think of him—he is an old man—if you had a daughter —"

Miss White was acting very well indeed ; though she was more concerned about herself than her father.

"I wass to say to you," Christina explained with some difficulty, "that if you wass saying that, Sir Keith had a message sent away to your father, and you wass not to think any more about that. And now, mem, I cannot tek you ashore ; is iss no business I hef with that ; and I could not go ashore myself whateffer ; but I would get you some dinner, mem."

"Then I suppose you don't understand the English language !" Miss White exclaimed, angrily. "I tell you I will neither eat nor drink so long as I am on board this yacht ! Go and tell Sir Keith Macleod what I have said."

So Miss White was left alone again ; and the slow time passed ; and she heard the murmured conversation of the men ; and also a measured pacing to and fro, which she took

to be the step of Macleod. Quick rushes of feeling went through her, indignation, a stubborn obstinacy, a wonder over the audacity of this thing, malevolent hatred even; but all these were being gradually subdued by the dominant claim of hunger. Miss White had acted the part of many heroines; but she was not herself a heroine—if there is anything heroic in starvation. It was growing to dusk when she again summoned the old Highland-woman.

“Get me something to eat,” said she; “I cannot die like a rat in a hole.”

“Yes, mem,” said Christina, in the most matter-of-fact way; for she had never been in a theatre in her life, and she had not imagined that Miss White’s threat meant anything at all. “The dinner is just ready now, mem; and if you will hef it in the saloon, there will be no one there; that wass Sir Keith’s message to you.”

“I will not have it in the saloon; I will have it here.”

“Ferry well, mem,” Christina said, submissively. “But you will go into the saloon, mem, when I will mek the bed for you, and the lamp will hef to be lit, but Hamish he will light the lamp for you. And are there any other things you wass thinking of that you would like, mem?”

“No; I want something to eat.”

“And Hamish, mem, he wass saying I will ask you whether you will hef the claret-wine, or—or—the other wine, mem, that makes a noise—”

“Bring me some water. But the whole of you will pay dearly for this!”

“I ask your pardon, mem?” said Christina, with great respect.

“Oh, go away, and get me something to eat!”

And in fact Miss White made a very good dinner, though the things had to be placed before her on her dressing-table. And her rage and indignation did not prevent her having, after all a glass or two of the claret-wine. And then she permitted Hamish to come in and light the swinging lamp; and thereafter Christina made up one of the two narrow beds. Miss White was left alone.

Many a hundred times had she been placed in great peril—on the stage; and she knew that on such occasions it had been her duty to clasp her hand on her forehead and set to work to find out how to extricate herself. Well, on this occasion she did not make use of any dramatic gesture; but she turned out the lamp, and threw herself on the top of this

narrow little bed ; and was determined that, before they got her conveyed to their savage home in the North, she would make one more effort for her freedom. Then she heard the man at the helm begin to hum to himself "*Fhir a bhata, na h-oro cile.*" The night darkened. And soon all the wild emotions of the day were forgotten ; for she was asleep.

* * * * *

Asleep—in the very waters through which she had sailed with her lover on the white summer day. But *Rose-leaf ! Rose-leaf ! what faint wind will carry you now to the South ?*

CHAPTER XLV.

THE VOYAGE OVER.

AND now the brave old *Umpire* is nearing her Northern home once more ; and surely this is a right royal evening for the reception of her. What although the sun has just gone down, and the sea around them become a plain of heaving and wrestling blue-black waves ? Far away, in that purple-black sea, lie long promontories that are of a still pale rose-color ; and the western sky is a blaze of golden-green ; and they know that the wild, beautiful radiance is still touching the wan walls of Castle Dare. And there is Ardalanish Point ; and that the ruddy Ross of Mull ; and there will be a good tide in the Sound of Iona. Why, then, do they linger, and keep the old *Umpire* with her sails flapping idly in the wind ?

"As you pass through Jura's Sound
Bend your course by Scarba's shore ;
Shun, oh shun, the gulf profound
Where Corrievreckan's surges roar !"

They are in no danger of Corrievreckan now ; they are in familiar waters ; only that is another Colonsay that lies away there in the south. Keith Macleod, seated up at the bow, is calmly regarding it. He is quite alone. There is no sound around him but the lapping of the waves.

"And ever as the year returns,
'The charm-bound sailors knows the day ;
For sadly still the Mermaid mourns
'The lovely chief of Colonsay."

And is he listening now for the wild sound of her singing? Or is he thinking of the brave Macphail, who went back after seven long months of absence, and found the maid of Colonsay still true to him? The ruby ring she had given him had never paled. There was one woman who could remain true to her absent lover.

Hamish came forward.

"Will we go on now, sir?" said he, in the Gaelic.

"No."

Hamish looked round. The shining clear evening looked very calm, notwithstanding the tossing of the blue-black waves. And it seemed wasteful to the old sailor to keep the yacht lying-to or aimlessly sailing this way and that while this favorable wind remained to them.

"I am not sure that the breeze will last, Sir Keith."

"Are you sure of anything, Hamish?" Macleod said, quite absently. "Well, there is one thing we can all make sure of. But I have told you, Hamish, I am not going up the Sound of Iona in daylight: why, there is not a man in all the islands who would not know of our coming by to-morrow morning. We will go up the Sound as soon as it is dark. It is a new moon to-night; and I think we can go without lights, Hamish."

"*Dunara* is coming south to-night, Sir Keith," the old man said.

"Why, Hamish, you seem to have lost all your courage as soon as you put Colin Laing ashore."

"Colin Laing! Is it Colin Laing!" exclaimed Hamish, indignantly. "I will know how to sail this yacht, and I will know the banks, and the tides, and the rocks better than any fifteen thousands of Colin Laings!"

"And what if the *Dunara* is coming south? If she cannot see us, we can see her."

But whether it was that Colin Laing had, before leaving the yacht, managed to convey to Hamish some notion of the risk he was running, or whether it was that he was merely anxious for his master's safety, it was clear that Hamish was far from satisfied. He opened and shut his big clasp-knife in an awkward silence. Then he said,—

"You will not go to Castle Dare, Sir Keith?"

Macleod started; he had forgotten that Hamish was there.

"No. I have told you where I am going."

"But there is not any good anchorage at that island

sir!" he protested. "Have I not been round every bay of it; and you too, Sir Keith? and you know there is not an inch of sand or of mud, but only the small loose stones. And then the shepherd they left there all by himself; it was mad he became at last, and took his own life too."

"Well, do you expect to see his ghost?" Macleod said. "Come, Hamish, you have lost your nerve in the South. Surely you are not afraid of being anywhere in the old yacht so long as she has good sea-room around her?"

"And if you are not wishing to go up the Sound of Iona in the daylight, Sir Keith," Hamish said, still clinging to the point, "we could bear a little to the south, and go round the outside of Iona."

"The Dubh-Artach men would recognize the *Umpire* at once," Macleod said, abruptly; and then he suggested to Hamish that he should get a little more way on the yacht, so that she might be a trifle steadier when Christina carried the dinner into the English lady's cabin. But indeed there was now little breeze of any kind. Hamish's fears of a dead calm was likely to prove true.

Meanwhile another conversation had been going forward in the small cabin below, that was now suffused by a strange warm light reflected from the evening sky. Miss White was looking very well now, after her long sea-voyage. During their first few hours in blue water she had been very ill indeed; and she repeatedly called on Christina to allow her to die. The old Highland-woman came to the conclusion that English ladies were rather childish in their way; but the only answer she made to this reiterated prayer was to make Miss White as comfortable as was possible, and to administer such restoratives as she thought desirable. At length, when recovery and a sound appetite set in, the patient began to show a great friendship for Christina. There was no longer any theatrical warning of the awful fate in store for everybody connected with this enterprise. She tried rather to enlist the old woman's sympathies on her behalf, and if she did not very well succeed in that direction, at least she remained on friendly terms with Christina and received from her the solace of much gossip about the whereabouts and possible destination of the ship.

And on this evening Christina had an important piece of news.

"Where have we got to now, Christina?" said Miss White, quite cheerfully, when the old woman entered.

"Oh yes, mem, we will still be off the Mull shore, but a good piece away from it, and there is not much wind, mem. But Hamish thinks we will get to the anchorage the night whatever."

"The anchorage!" Miss White exclaimed eagerly. "Where? You are going to Castle Dare, surely?"

"No, mem, I think not," said Christina. "I think it is an island; but you will not know the name of that island—there is no English for it at all."

"But where is it? Is it near Castle Dare?"

"Oh no, mem; it is a good way from Castle Dare; and it is out in the sea. Do you know Gometra, mem?—wass you ever going out to Gometra?"

"Yes, of course, I remember something about it anyway."

"Ah, well, it is away out past Gometra, mem; and not a good place for an anchorage whatever; but Hamish he will know all the anchorages."

"What on earth is the use of going there?"

"I do not know, mem."

"Is Sir Keith going to keep me on board this boat forever?"

"I do not know, mem."

Christina had to leave the cabin just then; when she returned she said, with some little hesitation,

"If I wass mekking so bold, men, ass to say this to you: Why are you not asking the questions of Sir Keith himself? He will know all about it; and if you were to come into the saloon, mem—"

"Do you think I would enter into any communication with him after his treatment of me?" said Miss White, indignantly. "No; let him atone for that first. When he has set me at liberty, then I will speak with him; but never so long as he keeps me shut up like a convict."

"I wass only saying, mem," Christina answered, with great respect, "that if you were wishing to know where we were going, Sir Keith will know that; but how can I know it? And you know, mem, Sir Keith has not shut you up in this cabin; you hef the saloon, if you would please to hef it."

"Thank you, I know!" rejoined Miss White. "If I choose, my gaol may consist of two rooms instead of one. I don't appreciate that amount of liberty. I want to be set ashore."

"That I hef nothing to do with, mem," Christina said, humbly, proceeding with her work.

Miss White, being left to think over these things, was beginning to believe that, after all, her obduracy was not likely to be of much service to her. Would it not be wiser to treat with the enemy—perhaps to outwit him by a show of forgiveness? Here they were approaching the end of the voyage—at least, Christina seemed to intimate as much; and if they were not exactly within call of friends, they would surely be within rowing distance of some inhabited island, even Gometra, for example. And if only a message could be sent to Castle Dare? Lady Macleod and Janet Macleod were women. They would not countenance this monstrous thing. If she could only reach them, she would be safe.

The rose-pink died away from the long promontories, and was succeeded by a sombre gray; the glory in the west sank down; a wan twilight came over the sea and the sky; and a small golden star, like the point of a needle, told where the Dubh-Artach men had lit their beacon for the coming night. The *Umpire* lay and idly rolled in this dead calm; Macleod paced up and down the deck in the solemn stillness. Hamish threw a tarpaulin over the skylight of the saloon, to cover the bewildering light from below; and then, as the time went slowly by, darkness came over the land and the sea. They were alone with the night, and the lapping waves, and the stars.

About ten o'clock there was a loud rattling of blocks and cordage—the first puff of a coming breeze had struck, her. The men were at their posts in a moment; there were a few sharp, quick orders from Hamish; and presently the old *Umpire*, with her great boom away over her quarter, was running free before a light southeasterly wind.

"Ay, ay!" said Hamish, in sudden gladness, "we will soon be by Ardalanish Point with a fine wind like this, Sir Keith; and if you would rather hef no lights on her—well, it is a clear night whateffer; and the *Dunara* she will hef up her lights."

The wind came in bits of squalls, it is true; but the sky overhead remained clear, and the *Umpire* bowled merrily along. Macleod was still on deck. They rounded the Ross of Mull, and got into the smoother waters of the Sound. Would any of the people in the cottages at Drraidh see this gray ghost of a vessel go gliding past over the dark water?

Behind them burned the yellow eye of Dubh-Artach; before them a few small red points told them of the Iona cottages; and still this phantom gray vessel held on her way. The *Umpire* was nearing her last anchorage.

And still she steals onward, like a thief in the night. She has passed through the Sound; she is in the open sea again; there is a calling of startled birds from over the dark bosom of the deep. Then far away they watch the light of a steamer; but she is miles from their course; they cannot even hear the throb of her engines.

It is another sound they hear—a low booming as of distant thunder. And that black thing away on their right—scarcely visible over the darkened waves—is that the channelled and sea-bird haunted Staffa, trembling through all her caves under the shock of the smooth Atlantic surge? For all the clearness of the starlit sky, there is a wild booming of waters all around her rocks; and the giant caverns answer; and the thunder shudders out to the listening sea.

The night drags on. The Dutchman is fast asleep in his vast Atlantic bed; the dull roar of the waves he has heard for millions of years is not likely to awake him. And Fladda and Lunga; surely this ghost-gray ship that steals by is not the old *Umpire* that used to visit them in the gay summer-time, with her red ensign flying, and the blue seas all around her? But here is a dark object on the waters that is growing larger and larger as one approaches it. The black outline of it is becoming sharp against the clear dome of stars. There is a gloom around as one gets nearer and nearer the bays and cliffs of this lonely island; and now one hears the sound of breakers on the rocks. Hamish and his men are on the alert. The topsail has been lowered. The heavy cable of the anchor lies ready by the windlass. And then, as the *Umpire* glides into smooth water, and her head is brought round to the light breeze, away goes the anchor with a rattle that awakes a thousand echoes; and all the startled birds among the rocks are calling through the night—the sea-pyots screaming shrilly, the curlews uttering their warning note, the herons croaking as they wing their slow flight away across the sea. The *Umpire* has got to her anchorage at last.

And scarcely was the anchor down when they brought him a message from the English lady. She was in the saloon, and wished to see him. He could scarcely believe this; for it was now past midnight, and she had never come into the

saloon before. But he went down through the fore-castle, and through his own stateroom, and opened the door of the saloon.

For a second the strong light almost blinded him ; but, at all events, he knew she was sitting there ; and that she was regarding him with no fierce indignation at all, but with quite a friendly look.

"Gertrude !" said he, in wonder ; but he did not approach her. He stood before her, as one who was submissive.

"So we have got to land at last," said she ; and more and more he wondered to hear the friendliness of her voice. Could it be true, then ? Or was it only one of those visions that had of late been torturing his brain ?

"Oh yes, Gerty !" said he. "We have got to an anchorage."

"I thought I would sit up for it," said she. "Christina said we should get to land some time to-night ; and I thought I would like to see you. Because, you know, Keith, you have used me very badly. And won't you sit down ?"

He accepted that invitation. *Could it be true ? could it be true ?* This was ringing in his ears. He heard her only in a bewildered way.

"And I want you to tell me what you mean to do with me," said she, frankly and graciously : "I am at your mercy, Keith."

"Oh, not that—not that," said he ; and he added, sadly enough, "it is I who have been at your mercy since ever I saw you, Gerty ; and it is for you to say what is to become of you and of me. And have you got over your anger now ? And will you think of all that made me do this, and try to forgive it for the sake of my love for you, Gerty ? Is there any chance of that now ?"

She rather avoided the earnest gaze that was bent on her. She did not notice how nervously his hand gripped the edge of the table near him.

"Well, it is a good deal to forgive, Keith ; you will acknowledge that yourself : and though you used to think that I was ready to sacrifice everything for fame, I did not expect you would make me a nine-days' wonder in this way. I suppose the whole thing is in the papers now."

"Oh no, Gerty ; I sent a message to your father."

"Well, that was kind of you—and audacious. Were you not afraid of his overtaking you ? The *Umpire* is not the

swiftest of sailers, you used to say ; and you know there are telegraphs and railways to all the ports."

"He did not know you were in the *Umpire*, Gerty. But of course, if he were very anxious about you, he would write or come to Dare. I should not be surprised if he were there now."

A quick look of surprise and gladness sprang to her face.

"Papa—at Castle Dare!" she exclaimed. "And Christina says it is not far from here."

"Not many miles away."

"Then, of course, they will know we are here in the morning!" she cried, in the indiscretion of sudden joy. "And they will come out for me."

"Oh no, Gerty, they will not come out for you. No human being but those on board knows that we are here. Do you think they could see you from Dare? And there is no one living now on the island. We are alone in the sea."

The light died away from her face ; but she said, cheerfully enough,—

"Well, I am at your mercy, then, Keith. Let us take it that way. Now you must tell me what part in the comedy you mean me to play ; for the life of me I can't make it out."

"Oh, Gerty, Gerty, do not speak like that!" he exclaimed. "You are breaking my heart! Is there none of the old love left? Is it all a matter for jesting?"

She saw she had been incautious.

"Well," said she, gently, "I was wrong ; I know it is more serious than that ; and I am not indisposed to forgive you, if you treat me fairly. I know you have great earnestness of nature ; and—and you were very fond of me ; and although you have risked a great deal in what you have done, still, men who are very deeply in love don't think much about consequences. And if I were to forgive you, and make friends again, what then?"

"And if we were as we used to be," said he, with a grave wistfulness in his face, "do you not think I would gladly take you ashore, Gerty?"

"And to Castle Dare?"

"Oh yes, to Castle Dare! Would not my mother and Janet be glad to welcome you?"

"And papa may be there?"

"If he is not there, can we not telegraph for him? Why,

Gerty, surely you would not be married anywhere but in the Highlands?"

At the mention of marriage she blanched somewhat; but she had nerved herself to play this part.

"Then, Keith," said she, gallantly, "I will make you a promise. Take me to Castle Dare to-morrow, and the moment I am within its doors I will shake hands with you, and forgive you, and we will be friends again as in the old days."

"We were more than friends, Gerty," said he, in a low voice.

"Let us be friends first, and then who knows what may not follow?" said she, brightly. "You cannot expect me to be overprofuse in affection just after being shut up like this?"

"Gerty," said he, and he looked at her with those strangely tired eyes, and there was a great gentleness in his voice, "do you know where you are? You are close to the island that I told you of—where I wish to have my grave on the cliff. But instead of a grave, would it not be a fine thing to have a marriage here? No, do not be alarmed, Gerty! it is only with your own good-will; and surely your heart will consent at last! Would not that be a strange wedding, too; with the minister from Salen; and your father on board; and the people from Dare? Oh, you would see such a number of boats come out that day, and we would go proudly back; and do you not think there would be a great rejoicing that day? Then all our troubles would be at an end, Gerty! There would be no more fear; and the theatres would never see you again; and the long happy life we should lead, we two together! And do you know the first thing I would get you, Gerty?—it would be a new yacht! I would go to the Clyde and have it built all for you. I would not have you go out again in this yacht, for you would then remember the days in which I was cruel to you; but in a new yacht you would not remember that any more; and do you not think we would have many a pleasant, long summer day on the deck of her, and only ourselves, Gerty? And you would sing the songs I first heard you sing, and I think the sailors would imagine they heard the singing of the mermaid of Colonsay; for there is no one can sing as you can sing, Gerty. I think it was that first took away my heart from me."

"But we can talk about all these things when I am on shore again," said she, coldly. "You cannot expect me

to be very favorably disposed so long as I am shut up here."

"But then," he said, "if you were on shore you might go away again from me, Gerty! The people would get at your ear again; they would whisper things to you; you would think about the theatres again. I have saved you, sweetheart; can I let you go back?"

The words were spoken with an eager affection, and yearning; but they sank into her mind with a dull and cold conviction that there was no escape for her through any way of artifice.

"Am I to understand, then," said she, "that you mean to keep me a prisoner here until I marry you?"

"Why do you speak like that, Gerty?"

"I demand an answer to my question."

"I have risked everything to save you; can I let you go back?"

A sudden flash of desperate anger—even of hatred—was in her eyes; her fine piece of acting had been of no avail.

"Well, let the farce end!" said she, with frowning eyebrows. "Before I came on board this yacht I had some pity for you. I thought you were at least a man, and had a man's generosity. Now I find you a coward, and a tyrant—"

"Gerty!"

"Oh, do not think you have frightened me with your stories of the revenge of your miserable chiefs and their savage slaves! Not a bit of it! Do with me what you like; I would not marry you if you gave me a hundred yachts!"

"Gerty!"

The anguish of his face was growing wild with despair.

"I say, let the farce end! I had pity for you—yes, I had! Now—I hate you!"

He sprang up with a quick cry, as of one shot to the heart. He regarded her, in a bewildered manner, for one brief second; and then he gently said, "Good-night, Gerty! God forgive you!" and he staggered backward, and got out of the saloon, leaving her alone.

See! the night is still fine. All around this solitary bay there is a wall of rock, jet black, against the clear, dark sky, with its myriad twinkling stars. The new moon has arisen; but it sheds but little radiance yet down there in the south.

There is a sharper gleam from one lambent planet—a thin line of golden-yellow light that comes all the way across from the black rocks until it breaks in flashes among the ripples close to the side of the yacht. Silence once more reigns around; only from time to time one hears the croak of a heron from the dusky shore.

What can keep this man up so late on deck? There is nothing to look at but the great bows of the yacht black against the pale gray sea, and the tall spars and the rigging going away up into the starlit sky, and the suffused glow from the skylight touching a yellow-gray on the main-boom. There is no need for the anchor-watch that Hamish was insisting on: the equinoctials are not likely to begin on such a night as this.

He is looking across the lapping gray water to the jet-black line of cliff. And there are certain words haunting him. He cannot forget them; he cannot put them away.

* * * * *

WHEREFORE IS LIGHT GIVEN TO HIM THAT IS IN MISERY, AND LIFE UNTO THE BITTER IN SOUL? * * * WHICH LONG FOR DEATH, BUT IT COMETH NOT; AND DIG FOR IT MORE THAN FOR HIDDEN TREASURES. * * * WHICH REJOICE EXCEEDINGLY, AND ARE GLAD WHEN THEY CAN FIND THE GRAVE.

* * * * *

Then, in the stillness of the night, he heard a breathing. He went forward, and found that Hamish had secreted himself behind the windlass. He uttered some exclamation in the Gaelic, and the old man rose and stood guiltily before him.

“Have I not told you to go below before? and will I have to throw you down into the forecastle?”

The old man stood irresolute for a moment. Then he said, also in his native tongue,—

“You should not speak like that to me, Sir Keith: I have known you many a year.”

Macleod caught Hamish’s hand.

“I beg your pardon, Hamish. You do not know. It is a sore heart I have this night.”

“Oh, God help us! Do I not know that!” he exclaimed, in a broken voice; and Macleod, as he turned away, could hear the old man crying bitterly in the dark. What else could Hamish do now for him who had been to him as the son of his old age?

"Go below now, Hamish," said Macleod in a gentle voice and the old man slowly and reluctantly obeyed.

But the night had not drawn to day when Macleod again went forward, and said, in a strange, excited whisper,—

"Hamish, Hamish, are you awake now?"

Instantly the old man appeared; he had not turned into his berth at all.

"Hamish, Hamish, do you hear the sound?" Macleod said, in the same wild way; "do you not hear the sound?"

"What sound, Sir Keith?" said he; for indeed there was nothing but the lapping of the water along the side of the yacht and a murmur of ripples along the shore.

"Do you not hear it, Hamish? It is a sound as of a brass-band!—a brass-band playing music—as if it was in a theatre. Can you not hear it, Hamish?"

"Oh, God help us! God help us!" Hamish cried.

"You do not hear it, Hamish?" he said. "Ah, it is some mistake. I beg your pardon for calling you, Hamish: now you will go below again."

"Oh no, Sir Keith," said Hamish. "Will I not stay on deck now till the morning? It is a fine sleep I have had; oh yes, I had a fine sleep. And how is one to know when the equinoctials may not come on?"

"I wish you to go below, Hamish."

And now this sound that is ringing in his ears is no longer of the brass-band that he had heard in the theatre. It is quite different. It has all the ghastly mirth of that song that Norman Ogilvie used to sing in the old, half-forgotten days. What is it that he hears?

"King Death was a rare old fellow,
He sat where no sun could shine;
And he lifted his hand so yellow,
And poured out his coal-black wine!
Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! for the coal-black wine!"

It is a strange mirth. It might almost make a man laugh. For do we not laugh gently when we bury a young child, and put the flowers over it, and know that it is at peace? The child has no more pain at the heart. Oh, Norman Ogilvie, are you still singing the wild song? and are you laughing now?—or is it the old man Hamish that is crying in the dark?



" There came to him many a maiden,
 Whose eyes had forgot to shine ;
 And widows with grief o'erladen,
 For a draught of his sleepy wine.
 Hurrah ! hurrah ! hurrah ! for the coal-black wine ! "

It is such a fine thing to sleep—when one has been fretting all the night, and spasms of fire go through the brain ! Ogilvie, Ogilvie, do you remember the laughing Duchess ? do you think she would laugh over one's grave ; or put her foot on it, and stand relentless, with anger in her eyes ? That is a sad thing ; but after it is over there is sleep.

* * * * *

" All came to the rare old fellow,
 Who laughed till his eyes dropped brine, .
 As he gave them his hand so yellow,
 And pledged them, in Death's black wine !
 Hurrah ! hurrah ! hurrah ! for the coal-black wine ! "

Hamish !—Hamish !—will you not keep her away from me ? I have told Donald what pibroch he will play ; I want to be at peace now. But the brass-band—the brass-band—I can hear the blare of the trumpets ; Ulva will know that we are here, and the Gometra men, and the sea-birds too, that I used to love. But she has killed all that now, and she stands on my grave. She will laugh, for she was light-hearted, like a young child. But you, Hamish, you will find the quiet grave for me ; and Donald will play the pibroch for me that I told him of ; and you will say no word to her of all that is over and gone.

* * * * *

See—he sleeps. This haggard-faced man is stretched on the deck ; and the pale dawn, arising in the east, looks at him ; and does not revive him, but makes him whiter still. You might almost think he was dead. But Hamish knows better than that ; for the old man comes stealthily forward ; and he has a great tartan plaid in his hands ; and very gently indeed he puts it over his young master. And there are tears running down Hamish's face ; and he says " The brave ad ! the brave lad ! "

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE END.

"DUNCAN," said Hamish, in a low whisper—for Macleod had gone below, and they thought he might be asleep in the small, hushed state-room, "this is a strange-looking day, is it not? And I am afraid of it in this open bay, with an anchorage no better than a sheet of paper for an anchorage. Do you see now how strange-looking it is?"

Duncan Cameron also spoke in his native tongue; and he said,—

"That is true, Hamish. And it was a day like this there was when the *Solan* was sunk at her moorings in Loch Hourn. Do you remember, Hamish? And it would be better for us now if we were in Loch Tua, or Loch-na-Keal, or in the dock that was built for the steamer at Tiree. I do not like the look of this day."

Yet to an ordinary observer it would have seemed that the chief characteristic of this pale, still day, was extreme and settled calm. There was not a breath of wind to ruffle the surface of the sea; but there was a slight, glassy swell, and that only served to show curious opalescent tints under the suffused light of the sun. There were no clouds; there was only a thin veil of faint and sultry mist all across the sky; the sun was invisible, but there was a glare of yellow at one point of the heavens. A dead calm; but heavy, oppressed, sultry. There was something in the atmosphere that seemed to weigh on the chest.

"There was a dream I had this morning," continued Hamish, in the same low tones. "It was about my little granddaughter Christina. You know my little Christina, Duncan. And she said to me, 'What have you done with Sir Keith Macleod? Why have you not brought him back? He was under your care, grandfather.' I did not like that dream."

"Oh, you are becoming as bad as Sir Keith Macleod himself?" said the other. "He does not sleep. He talks to himself. You will become like that if you pay attention to foolish dreams, Hamish."

Hamish's quick temper leaped up.

"What do you mean, Duncan Cameron, by saying, 'as bad as Sir Keith Macleod? You—you come from Ross: perhaps they have not good masters there. I tell you there is not any man in Ross, or in Sutherland either, is as good a master, and as brave a lad, as Sir Keith Macleod—not any one, Duncan Cameron!'"

"I did not mean anything like that, Hamish," said the other, humbly. "But there was a breeze this morning. We could have got over to Loch Tua. Why did we stay here, where there is no shelter and no anchorage? Do you know what is likely to come after a day like this?"

"It is your business to be a sailor on board this yacht; it is not your business to say where she will go," said Hamish.

But all the same the old man was becoming more and more alarmed at the ugly aspect of the dead calm. The very birds, instead of stalking among the still pools, or lying buoyant on the smooth waters, were excitedly calling, and whirring from one point to another.

"If the equinoctials were to begin now," said Duncan Cameron, "this is a fine place to meet the equinoctials! An open bay, without shelter; and a ground that is no ground for an anchorage. It is not two anchors or twenty anchors would hold in such ground."

Macleod appeared; the man was suddenly silent. Without a word to either of them—and that was not his wont—he passed to the stern of the yacht. Hamish knew from his manner that he would not be spoken to. He did not follow him, even with all this vague dread on his mind.

The day wore on to the afternoon. Macleod, who had been pacing up and down the deck, suddenly called Hamish. Hamish came aft at once.

"Hamish," said he, with a strange sort of laugh, "do you remember this morning, before the light came? Do you remember that I asked you about a brass-band that I heard playing?"

Hamish looked at him, and said, with an earnest anxiety,

"Oh, Sir Keith, you will pay no heed to that! It is very common; I have heard them say it is very common. Why, to hear a brass-band, to be sure! There is nothing more common than that. And you will not think you are unwell merely because you think you can hear a brass-band playing."

"I want you to tell me, Hamish," said he, in the same jesting way, "whether my eyes have followed the example of my ears, and are playing tricks. Do you think they are bloodshot, with my lying on deck in the cold? Hamish, what do you see all around?"

The old man looked at the sky, and the shore, and the sea. It was a marvellous thing. The world was all enshrouded in a salmon-colored mist: there was no line of horizon visible between the sea and the sky.

"It is red, Sir Keith," said Hamish.

"Ah! Am I in my senses this time? And what do you think of a red day, Hamish? That is not a usual thing."

"Oh, Sir Keith, it will be a wild night this night! And we cannot stay here, with this bad anchorage!"

"And where would you go, Hamish—in a dead calm?" Macleod asked, still with a smile on the wan face.

"Where would I go?" said the old man, excitedly. "I—I will take care of the yacht. But you, Sir Keith; oh! you—you will go ashore now. Do you know, sir, the sheiling that the shepherd had? It is a poor place; oh yes; but Duncan Cameron and I will take some things ashore. And do you not think we can look after the yacht? She has met the equinoctials before, if it is the equinoctials that are beginning. She has met them before; and cannot she meet them now? But you, Sir Keith, you will go ashore.

Macleod burst out laughing, in an odd sort of fashion.

"Do you think I am good at running away when there is any kind of danger, Hamish. Have you got into the English way. Would you call me a coward too? Nonsense, nonsense, nonsense, Hamish! I—why, I am going to drink a glass of the coal-black wine, and have done with it. I will drink it to the health of my sweetheart, Hamish!"

"Sir Keith," said the old man, beginning to tremble, though he but half understood the meaning of the scornful mirth, "I have had charge of you since you were a young lad."

"Very well!"

"And Lady Macleod will ask of me, 'Such and such a thing happened: what did you do for my son?' Then I will say, 'Your ladyship, we were afraid of the equinoctials; and we got Sir Keith to go ashore; and the next day we went ashore for him; and now we have brought him back to Castle Dare!'"

"Hamish, Hamish, you are laughing at me! Or you want to call me a coward? Don't you know I should be afraid of the ghost of the shepherd who killed himself? Don't you know that the English people call me a coward?"

"May their souls dwell in the downmost hall of perdition!" said Hamish, with his cheeks becoming a gray-white; "and every woman that ever came of the accursed race!"

He looked at the old man for a second, and he gripped his hand.

"Do not say that, Hamish—that is folly. But you have been my friend. My mother will not forget you—it's not the way of a Macleod to forget—whatever happens to me."

"Sir Keith!" Hamish cried, "I do not know what you mean! But you will go ashore before the night?"

"Go ashore," Macleod answered, with a return to this wild, bantering tone, "when I am going to see my sweetheart? Oh no! Tell Christina, now! Tell Christina to ask the young English lady to come into the saloon, for I have something to say to her. Be quick, Hamish!"

Hamish went away; and before long he returned with the answer that the young English lady was in the saloon. And now he was no longer haggard and piteous, but joyful; and there was a strange light in his eyes.

"Sweetheart," said he, "are you waiting for me at last? I have brought you a long way. Shall we drink a glass now at the end of the voyage?"

"Do you wish to insult me?" said she; but there was no anger in her voice: there was more of fear in her eyes as she regarded him.

"You have no other message for me than the one you gave me last night, Gerty?" said he, almost cheerfully. "It is all over, then? You would go away from me forever? But we will drink a glass before we go!"

He sprang forward, and caught both her hands in his with the grip of a vice.

"Do you know what you have done, Gerty?" said he, in a low voice. "Oh, you have soft, smooth, English ways; and you are like a rose-leaf; and you are like a queen, whom all people are glad to serve. But do you know that you have killed a man's life? And there is no penalty for that in the South, perhaps; but you are no longer in the South. And if you have this very night to drink a glass with me, you

will not refuse it? It is only a glass of the coal-black wine!"

She struggled back from him, for there was a look in his face that frightened her. But she had a wonderful self command.

"Is that the message I was to hear?" she said, coldly.

"Why, sweetheart, are you not glad? Is not that the only gladness left for you and for me, that we should drink one glass together, and clasp hands, and say good-by? What else is there left? What else could come to you and to me? And it may not be this night, or to-morrow night; but one night I think it will come; and then, sweetheart, we will have one more glass together, before the end."

He went on deck. He called Hamish.

"Hamish," said he, in a grave, matter of fact way, "I don't like the look of this evening. Did you say the sheiling was still on the island?"

"Oh yes, Sir Keith," said Hamish, with great joy; for he thought his advice was going to be taken, after all.

"Well, now, you know the gales, when they begin, sometimes last for two, or three, or four days; and I will ask you to see that Christina takes a good store of things to the sheiling before the darkness comes on. Take plenty of things now, Hamish, and put them in the sheiling, for I am afraid this is going to be a wild night."

Now, indeed, all the red light had gone away; and as the sun went down there was nothing but a spectral whiteness over the sea and the sky; and the atmosphere was so close and sultry that it seemed to suffocate one. Moreover, there was a dead calm; if they had wanted to get away from this exposed place, how could they? They could not get into the gig and pull this great yacht over to Loch Tua.

It was with a light heart that Hamish set about this thing; and Christina forthwith filled a hamper with tinned meats, and bread, and whiskey, and what not. And fuel was taken ashore, too; and candles, and a store of matches. If the gales were coming on, as appeared likely from this ominous-looking evening, who could tell how many days and nights the young master—and the English lady, too, if he desired her company—might not have to stay ashore, while the men took the chance of the sea with this yacht, or perhaps seized the occasion of some lull to make for some place of shelter? There was Loch Tua, and there was the bay at

Bunessan, and there was the little channel called Polterriv, behind the rocks opposite Iona. Any shelter at all was better than this exposed place, with the treacherous anchorage.

Hamish and Duncan Cameron returned to the yacht.

"Will you go ashore now, Sir Keith?" the old man said.

"Oh no; I am not going ashore yet, It is not yet time to run away, Hamish."

He spoke in a friendly and pleasant fashion, though Hamish, in his increasing alarm, thought it no proper time for jesting. They hauled the gig up to the davits, however, and again the yacht lay in dead silence in this little bay.

The evening grew to dusk; the only change visible in the spectral world of pale yellow-white mist was the appearance in the sky of a number of small, detached bulbous-looking clouds of a dusky blue-gray. They had not drifted hither, for there was no wind. They had only appeared. They were absolutely motionless.

But the heat and the suffocation in this atmosphere became almost insupportable. The men, with bare heads, and jerseys unbuttoned at the neck, were continually going to the cask of fresh water beside the windlass. Nor was there any change when the night came on. If anything, the night was hotter than the evening had been. They awaited in silence what might come of this ominous calm.

Hamish came aft.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Keith," said he, "but I am thinking we will have an anchor-watch to-night."

"You will have no anchor-watch to-night," Macleod answered, slowly, from out of the darkness. "I will be all the anchor-watch you will need, Hamish, until the morning."

"You, sir!" Hamish cried. "I have been waiting to take you ashore: and surely it is ashore that you are going!"

Just as he had spoken there was a sound that all the world seemed to stand still to hear. It was a low murmuring sound of thunder; but it was so remote as almost to be inaudible. The next moment an awful thing occurred. The two men standing face to face in the dark suddenly found themselves in a blaze of blinding steel-blue light; and at the very same instant the thunder-roar crackled and shook all around them like the firing of a thousand cannon. How the wild echoes went booming over the sea! Then they

were in the black night again. There was a period of awed silence.

"Hamish," Macleod said, quickly, "do as I tell you now! Lower the gig; take the men with you, and Christina, and go ashore, and remain in the sheiling till the morning."

"I will not!" Hamish cried. "Oh, Sir Keith, would you have me do that?"

Macleod had anticipated his refusal. Instantly he went forward and called up Christina. He ordered Duncan Cameron and John Cameron to lower away the gig. He got them all in but Hamish.

"Hamish," said he, "you are a smaller man than I. Is it on such a night, that you would have me quarrel with you? Must I throw you into the boat?"

The old man clasped his trembling hands together as if in prayer; and he said, with an agonized and broken voice,

"Oh, Sir Keith, you are my master, and there is nothing I will not do for you; but only this one night you will let me remain with the yacht? I will give you the rest of my life; but only this one night—"

"Into the gig with you!" Macleod cried, angrily. "Why, man, don't you think I can keep anchor-watch?" But then he added, very gently, "Hamish, shake hands with me now. You were my friend, and you must get ashore before the sea rises."

"I will stay in the dingy, then?" the old man entreated.

"You will go ashore, Hamish; and this very instant, too. If the gale begins, how will you get ashore. Good-by, Hamish—*good-night!*"

Another white sheet of flame quivered all around them, just as this black figure was descending into the gig; and then the fierce hell of sounds broke loose once more. Sea and sky together seemed to shudder at the wild uproar, and far away the sounds went thundering through the hollow night. How could one hear if there was any sobbing in that departing boat, or any last cry of farewell? It was Ulva calling now, and Fladda answering from over the black water; and the Dutchman is surely awake at last!

There came a stirring of wind from the east, and the sea began to moan. Surely the poor fugitives must have reached the shore now. And then there was a strange noise in the distance: in the awful silence between the peals of thunder it would be heard; it came nearer and nearer—a low murmuring noise, but full of secret life and thrill—it came along

like the tread of a thousand armies—and then the gale struck its first blow. The yacht reeled under the stroke, but her bows staggered up again like a dog that has been felled, and after one or two convulsive plunges she clung hard at the strained cables. And now the gale was growing in fury, and the sea rising. Blinding showers of rain swept over, hissing and roaring; the white tongues of flame were shooting this way and that across the startled heavens; and there was a more awful thunder than even the falling of the Atlantic surge booming into the great sea-caves. In the abysmal darkness the spectral arms of the ocean rose white in their angry clamor; and then another blue gleam would lay bare the great heaving and wreathing bosom of the deep. What devil's dance is this? Surely it cannot be Ulva—Ulva the green-shored—Ulva that the sailors, in their love of her, call softly *Ool-a-va*—that is laughing aloud with wild laughter on this awful night? And Colonsay, and Lunga, and Fladda—they were beautiful and quiet in the still summer-time; but now they have gone mad, and they are flinging back the plunging sea in white masses of foam, and they are shrieking in their fierce joy of the strife. And Staffa—Staffa is far away and alone; she is trembling to her core: how long will the shuddering caves withstand the mighty hammer of the Atlantic surge? And then again the sudden wild gleam startles the night, and one sees, with an appalling vividness, the driven white waves and the black island; and then again a thousand echoes go booming along the iron-bound coast. What can be heard in the roar of the hurricane, and the hissing of rain, and the thundering whirl of the waves on the rocks? Surely not the glad last cry: SWEETHEART! YOUR HEALTH! YOUR HEALTH IN THE COAL-BLACK WINE?

* * * * *

The poor fugitives crouching in among the rocks: is it the blinding rain or the driven white surf that is in their eyes? But they have sailors' eyes; they can see through the awful storm; and their gaze is fixed on one small green point far out there in the blackness—the starboard light of the doomed ship. It wavers like a will-o'-the-wisp, but it does not recede; the old *Umpire* still clings bravely to her chain-cables.

And amidst all the din of the storm they hear the voice of Hamish lifted aloud in lamentation:—

“Oh, the brave lad! the brave lad! And who is to save

my young master now? and who will carry this tale back to Castle Dare? They will say to me: 'Hamish, you had charge of the young lad: you put the first gun in his hand: you had charge of him: he had the love of a son for you: what is it you have done with him this night?' He is my Absalom; he is my brave young lad: oh, do you think that I will let him drown and do nothing to try to save him? Do you think that? Duncan Cameron, are you a man? Will you get into the gig with me and pull out to the *Umpire*?"

"By God," said Duncan Cameron, solemnly, "I will do that! I have no wife; I do not care. I will go into the gig with you, Hamish; but we will never reach the yacht—this night or any night that is to come."

Then the old woman Christina shrieked aloud, and caught her husband by the arm.

"Hamish? Hamish! Are you going to drown yourself before my eyes?"

He shook her hand away from him.

"My young master ordered me ashore: I have come ashore. But I myself, I order myself back again. Duncan Cameron, they will never say that we stood by and saw Macleod of Dare go down to his grave!"

They emerged from the shelter of this great rock; the hurricane was so fierce that they had to cling to one boulder after another to save themselves from being whirled into the sea. But were these two men by themselves? Not likely! It was a party of five men that now clambered along the slippery rocks to the shingle up which they had hauled the gig, and one wild lightning-flash saw them with their hands on the gunwale, reay to drag her down to the water. There was a surf raging there that would have swamped twenty gigs: these five men were going of their own free-will and choice to certain death—so much had they loved the young master.

But a piercing cry from Christina arrested them. They looked out to sea. What was this sudden and awful thing? Instead of the starboard green light, behold! the port red light—and that moving? Oh see! how it recedes, wavering, flickering through the whirling vapor of the storm! And there again is the green light! Is it a witch's dance, or are they strange death-fires hovering over the dark ocean grave? But Hamish knows too well what it means; and with a wild cry of horror and despair, the old man sinks on his knees and clasps his hands, and stretches them out to the terrible sea.

"Oh Macleod, Macleod! are you going away from me forever and we will go up the hills together and on the lochs together no more—no more—no more! Oh, the brave lad that he was!—and the good master! And who was not proud of him—my handsome lad—and he the last of the Macleods of Dare?"

Arise, Hamish, and have the gig hauled up into shelter; for will you not want it when the gale abates, and the seas are smooth, and you have to go away to Dare, you and your comrades, with silent tongues and sombre eyes? Why this wild lamentation in the darkness of the night? The stricken heart that you loved so well has found peace at last; the coal-black wine has been drank; there is an end! And you, you poor cowering fugitives, who only see each other's terrified faces when the wan gleam of the lightning blazes through the sky, perhaps it is well that you should weep and wail for the young master; but that is soon over, and the day will break. And this is what I am thinking of now: when the light comes, and the seas are smooth, then which of you—oh, which of you all will tell this tale to the two women at Castle Dare.

* * * * *

So fair shines the morning sun on the white sands of Iona! The three days' gale is over. Behold, how Ulva—Ulva the green-shored—the *Ool-ava* that the sailors love—is laughing out again to the clear skies! And the great skarts on the shores of Erisgeir are spreading abroad their dusky wings to get them dried in the sun; and the seals are basking on the rocks in Loch-na-Keal; and in Loch Scridain the white gulls sit buoyant on the blue sea. There go the Gometra men in their brown-sailed boat to look after the lobster-traps at Staffa, and very soon you will see the steamer come round the far Cailleach Point; over at Erraidh they are signalling to the men at Dubh-artach, and they are glad to have a message from them after the heavy gale. The new, bright day has begun; the world has awakened again to the joyous sunlight; there is a chattering of the sea-birds all along the shores. It is a bright, eager, glad day for all the world. But there is silence in Castle Dare!

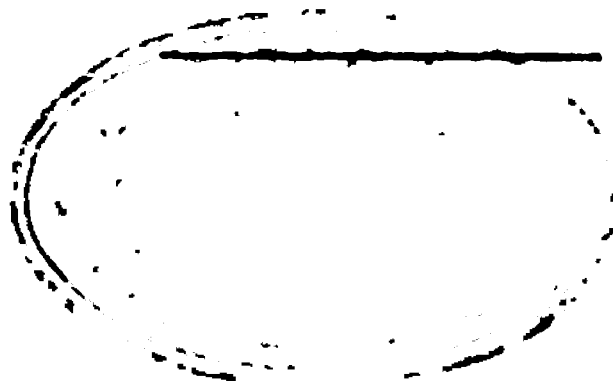
THE END.

S U N R I S E.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK.

Author of "Shandon Bells," "Yolande," "Strange Adventures of a Phaeton," "Madcap Violet," etc., etc.



NEW YORK:

JOHN B. ALDEN, PUBLISHER,

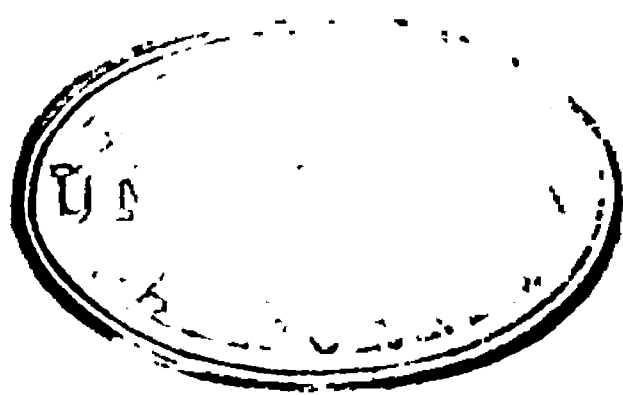
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SUNRISE.

CHAPTER I.

A FIRST INTERVIEW.

ONE chilly afternoon in February, while as yet the London season had not quite begun, though the streets were busy enough, an open barouche was being rapidly driven along Piccadilly in the direction of Coventry Street; and its two occupants, despite the dull roar of vehicles around them, seemed to be engaged in eager conversation. One of these two was a tall, handsome, muscular-looking man of about thirty, with a sun-tanned face, piercing gray eyes, and a reddish-brown beard cropped in the foreign fashion; the other, half hidden among the voluminous furs of the carriage, was a pale, humpbacked lad, with a fine, expressive, intellectual face, and large, animated, almost woman-like eyes. The former was George Brand, of Brand Beeches, Bucks, a bachelor unattached, and a person of no particular occupation, except that he had tumbled about the world a good deal, surveying mankind with more or less of interest or indifference. His companion and friend, the bright-eyed, beautiful-faced, humpbacked lad, was Ernest Francis D'Agincourt, thirteenth Baron Evelyn.

The discussion was warm; though the elder of the two friends spoke deprecatingly, at times even scornfully.

"I know what is behind all that," he said. "They are making a dupe of you, Evelyn. A parcel of miserable Leicester Square conspirators, plundering the working-man of all countries of his small savings, and humbugging him with promises of twopenny-halfpenny revolutions! That is not the sort of thing for you to mix in. It is not English, all that dagger and dark-lantern business, even if it were real; but when it is only theatrical—when they are only stage daggers—when the wretched creatures who mouth about assas-

sination and revolution are only swaggering for half-pence—bah! What part do you propose to play?”

“I tell you it has nothing to do with daggers and dark lanterns,” said the other with even greater warmth. “Why will you run your head against a windmill? Why must you see farther into a mile-stone than anybody else? I wonder, with all your travelling, you have not got rid of some of that detestable English prejudice and suspicion. I tell you that when I am allowed, even as an outsider, to see something of this vast organization for the defence of the oppressed, for the protection of the weak, the vindication of the injured, in every country throughout the globe—when I see the splendid possibilities before it—when I find that even a useless fellow like myself may do some little thing to lessen the mighty mass of injustice and wrong in the world—well, I am not going to stop to see that every one of my associates is of pure English birth, with a brother-in-law on the Bench, and an unclé in the House of Lords. I am glad enough to have something to do that is worth doing; something to believe in; something to hope for. You—what do you believe in? What is there in heaven or earth that you believe in?”

“Suppose I say that I believe in you, Evelyn?” said his friend, quite good-naturedly; “and some day, when you can convince me that your newly discovered faith is all right, you may find me becoming your meek disciple, and even your apostle. But I shall want something more than Union speeches, you know.”

By this time the carriage had passed along Coventry Street, turned into Prince’s Street, and been pulled up opposite a commonplace-looking house in that distinctly dingy thoroughfare, Lisle Street, Soho.

“Not quite Leicester Square, but near enough to serve,” said Brand, with a contemptuous laugh, as he got out of the barouche, and then, with the greatest of care and gentleness, assisted his companion to alight.

They crossed the pavement and rang a bell. Almost instantly the door was opened by a stout, yellow-haired, bleary-eyed old man, who wore a huge overcoat adorned with masses of shabby fur, and who carried a small lamp in his hand, for the afternoon had grown to dusk. The two visitors were evidently expected. Having given the younger of them a deeply respectful greeting in German, the fur-coated old gentleman shut the door after them, and proceeded to show the way up a flight of narrow and not particularly clean wooden stairs.

"Conspiracy doesn't seem to pay," remarked George Brand, half to himself.

On the landing they were confronted by a number of doors, one of which the old German threw open. They entered a large, plainly furnished, well-lit room, looking pretty much like a merchant's office, though the walls were mostly hung with maps and plans of foreign cities. Brand looked round with a supercilious air. All his pleasant and friendly manner had gone. He was evidently determined to make himself as desperately disagreeable as an Englishman can make himself when introduced to a foreigner whom he suspects. But even he would have had to confess that there was no suggestion of trap-doors or sliding panels in this ordinary, business-like room; and not a trace of a dagger or a dark lantern anywhere.

Presently, from a door opposite, an elderly man of middle height and spare and sinewy frame walked briskly in, shook hands with Lord Evelyn, was introduced to the tall, red-bearded Englishman (who still stood, hat in hand, and with a portentous stiffness in his demeanor), begged his two guests to be seated, and himself sat down at an open bureau, which was plentifully littered with papers.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Brand," he said, speaking carefully, and with a considerable foreign accent. "Lord Evelyn has several times promised me the honor of making your acquaintance."

Mr. Brand merely bowed: he was intent on making out what manner of man this suspected foreigner might be; and he was puzzled. At first sight Ferdinand Lind appeared to be about fifty or fifty-five years of age; his closely cropped hair was gray; and his face, in repose, somewhat care-worn. But then when he spoke there was an almost youthful vivacity in his look; his dark eyes were keen, quick, sympathetic; and there was even a certain careless ease about his dress—about the turned-down collar and French-looking neck-tie, for example—that had more of the air of the student than of the pedant about it. All this at the first glance. It was only afterward you came to perceive what was denoted by those heavy, seamed brows, the firm, strong mouth, and the square line of the jaw. These told you of the presence of an indomitable and inflexible will. Here was a man born to think, and control, and command.

"With that prospect before me," he continued, apparently taking no notice of the Englishman's close scrutiny, "I must ask you, Mr. Brand—well, you know, it is merely a matter of

form—but I must ask you to be so very kind as to give me your word of honor that you will not disclose anything you may see or learn here. Have you any objection?"

Brand stared, then said, coldly,

"Oh dear, no. I will give you that pledge, if you wish it."

"It is so easy to deal with Englishmen," said Mr. Lind, politely. "A word, and it is done. But I suppose Lord Evelyn has told you that we have no very desperate secrets. Secrecy, you know, one must use sometimes; it is an inducement to many—most people are fond of a little mystery; and it is harmless."

Brand said nothing; Lord Evelyn thought he might have been at least civil. But when an Englishman is determined on being stiff, his stiffness is gigantic.

"If I were to show you some of the tricks of this very room," said this grizzled old foreigner with the boyish necktie, "you might call me a charlatan; but would that be fair? We have to make use of various means for what we consider a good end, a noble end; and there are many people who love mystery and secrecy. With you English it is different—you must have everything above-board."

The pale, fine face of the sensitive lad sitting there became clouded over with disappointment. He had brought this old friend of his with some vague hope that he might become a convert, or at least be sufficiently interested to make inquiries; but Brand sat silent, with a cold indifference that was only the outward sign of an inward suspicion.

"Sometimes, it is true," continued Mr. Lind, in nowise disconcerted, "we stumble on the secrets of others. Our association has innumerable feelers; and we make it our business to know what we can of everything that is going on. For example, I could tell you of an odd little incident that occurred last year in Constantinople. A party of four gentlemen were playing cards there in a private room."

Brand started. The man who was speaking took no notice.

"There were two Austrian officers, a Roumanian count, and an Englishman," he continued, in the most matter-of-fact way. "It was in a private room, as I said. The Englishman was, after a time, convinced that the Roumanian was cheating; he caught his wrist—showed the false cards; then he managed to ward off the blow of a dagger which the Roumanian aimed at him, and by main force carried him to the door and threw him down-stairs. It was cleverly done, but the Eng-

lishman was very big and strong. Afterward the two Austrian officers, who knew the Verdt family, begged the Englishman never to reveal what had occurred; and the three promised secrecy. Was not that so?"

The man looked up carelessly. The Englishman's apathy was no longer visible.

"Y-yes," he stammered.

"Would you like to know what became of Count Verdt?" he asked, with an air of indifference.

"Yes, certainly," said the other.

"Ah! Of course you know the Castel' del Ovo?"

"At Naples? Yes."

"You remember that out at the point, beside the way that leads from the shore to the fortress, there are many big rocks, and the waves roll about there. Three weeks after you caught Count Verdt cheating at cards, his dead body was found floating there."

"Gracious heavens!" Brand exclaimed, with his face grown pale. And then he added, breathlessly, "Suicide?"

Mr. Lind smiled.

"No. Reassure yourself. When they picked out the body from the water, they found the mouth gagged, and the hands tied behind the back."

Brand stared at this man.

"Then you—?" He dared not complete the question.

"I? Oh, I had nothing to do with it, any more than yourself. It was a Camorra affair."

He had been speaking quite indifferently; but now a singular change came over his manner.

"And if I *had* had something to do with it?" he said, vehemently; and the dark eyes were burning with a quick anger under the heavy brows. Then he spoke more slowly, but with a firm emphasis in his speech. "I will tell you a little story; it will not detain you, sir. Suppose that you have a prison so overstocked with political prisoners that you must keep sixty or seventy in the open yard adjoining the outer wall. You have little to fear; they are harmless, poor wretches; there are several old men—two women. Ah! but what are the poor devils to do in those long nights that are so dark and so cold? However they may huddle together, they freeze; if they keep not moving, they die; you find them dead in the morning. If you are a Czar you are glad of that, for your prisons are choked; it is very convenient. And, then suppose you have a clever fellow who finds out a narrow passage between the implement-house and the wall; and he says.

‘There, you can work all night at digging a passage out; and who in the morning will suspect?’ Is not that a fine discovery, when one must keep moving in the dark to prevent one’s self stiffening into a corpse? Oh yes; then you find the poor devils, in their madness, begin to tear the ground up; what tools have they but their fingers, when the implement-house is locked? The poor devils!—old men, too, and women; and how they take their turn at the slow work, hour after hour, week after week, all through the long, still nights! Inch by inch it is; and the poor devils become like rabbits, burrowing for a hole to reach the outer air; and do you know that, after a time, the first wounds heal, and your fingers become like stumps of iron—”

He held out his two hands; the ends of the fingers were seamed and corrugated, as if they had been violently scalded. But he could not hold them steady—they were trembling with the suppressed passion that made his whole frame tremble.

“Relay after relay, night after night, week after week, month after month, until those poor devils of rabbits had actually burrowed a passage out into the freedom of God’s world again. And some said the Czar himself had heard of it, and would not interfere, for the prisons were choked; and some said the wife of the governor was Polish, and had a kind heart; but what did it matter when the time was drawing near? And always this clever fellow—do you know, sir, his name was Verdt too?—encouraging, helping, goading these poor people on. ‘Then the last night—how the miserable rabbits of creatures kept huddled together, shivering in the dark, till the hour arrived! and then the death-like stillness they found outside; and the wild wonder and fear of it; and the old men and the women crying like children to find themselves in the free air again. Marie Falevitch—that was my sister-in-law—she kissed me, and was laughing when she whispered, ‘*Eljen a haza!*’ I think she was a little off her head with the long, sleepless nights.”

He stopped for a second; his throat seemed choked.

“Did I tell you they had all got out?—the poor devils all wondering there, and scarcely knowing where to go. And now suppose, sir—ah! you don’t know anything about these things, you happy English people—suppose you found the black night around you all at once turned to a blaze of fire—a red hell opened on all sides of you, and the bullets plowing your comrades down; the old men crying for mercy, the young ones falling only with a groan; the women—my God! Did you ever hear a woman shriek when she was struck

through the heart with a bullet? Marie Falevitch fell at my feet; but I could not raise her—I was struck down too. It was a week after that I came to my senses. I was in the prison, but the prison was not quite so full. Czars and governors have a fine way of thinning prisons when they get too crowded."

These last words were spoken in a calm, contemptuous way; the man was evidently trying hard to control the fierce passion that these memories had stirred up. He had clinched one hand, and put it firmly on the desk before him, so that it should not tremble.

"Well, now, Mr. Brand," he continued, slowly, "let us suppose that when you come to yourself again, you hear the rumors that are about: you hear, for example, that Count Verdt—that exceedingly clever man—has been graciously pardoned by the Czar for revealing the villanous conspiracy of his fellow-prisoners; and that he has gone off to the South with a bag of money. Do you not think that you would remember the name of that clever person? Do you not think you would say to yourself, 'Well, it may not be to-day, or to-morrow, or the next day: *but some day?*'"

Again the dark eyes glowed; but he had a wonderful self-control.

"You would remember the name, would you not, if you had your sister-in-law, and your only brother, and six or seven of your old friends and comrades all shot on the one night?"

"This was the same Count Verdt?" Brand asked, eagerly.

"Yes," said the other, after a considerable pause. Then he added, with an involuntary sigh, "I had been following his movements for some time; but the Camorra stepped in. They are foolish people, those Camorristi—foolish and ignorant. They punish for very trifling offences, and they do not make sufficient warning of their punishments. Then they are quite imbecile in the way they attempt to regulate labor."

He was now talking in quite a matter-of-fact way. The clinched hand was relaxed.

"Besides," continued Ferdinand Lind, with the cool air of a critic, "their conduct is too scandalous. The outer world believes they are nothing but an association of thieves and cut-throats; that is because they do not discountenance vulgar and useless crime; because there is not enough authority, nor any proper selection of members. In the affairs of the world, one has sometimes to make use of queer agents—that

is admitted; and you cannot have any large body of people without finding a few scoundrels among them. I suppose one might even say that about your very respectable Church of England. But you only bring a society into disrepute—you rob it of much usefulness—you put the law and society against it—when you make it the refuge of common murderers and thieves.”

“I should hope so,” remarked George Brand. If this suspected foreigner had resumed his ordinary manner, so had he: he was again the haughty, suspicious, almost supercilious Englishman.

Poor Lord Evelyn! The lad looked quite distressed. These two men were so obviously antipathetic that it seemed altogether hopeless to think of their ever coming together.

“Well,” said Mr. Lind, in his ordinary polished and easy manner, “I must not seek to detain you; for it is a cold night to keep horses waiting. But, Mr. Brand, Lord Evelyn dines with us to-morrow evening: if you have nothing better to do, will you join our little party? My daughter, I am sure, will be most pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“Do, Brand, there’s a good fellow!” struck in his friend. “I haven’t seen anything of you for such a long time.”

“I shall be very happy indeed,” said the tall Englishman, wondering whether he was likely to meet a goodly assemblage of sedition-mongers at this foreign person’s table.

“We dine at a quarter to eight. The address is No. — Curzon Street; but perhaps you had better take this card.”

So they left, and were conducted down the staircase by the stout old German; and scrambled up into the furs of the barouche.

“So he has a daughter?” said Brand, as the two friends together drove down to Buckingham Street, where they were to dine at his rooms.

“Oh, yes; his daughter Natalie,” said Lord Evelyn, eagerly. “I am so glad you will see him to-morrow night!”

“And they live on Curzon Street,” said the other, reflectively. “H’m! Conspiracy *does* pay, then!”

CHAPTER II.

PLEADINGS.

“BROTHER SENIOR WARDEN, your place in the lodge?” said Mr. Brand, looking at the small dinner-table.

"You forget," his companion said. "I am only in the nursery as yet—an Illuminatus Minor, as it were. However, I don't think I can do better than sit where Waters has put me; I can have a glimpse of the lights on the river. But what an extraordinary place for you to come to for rooms!"

They had driven down through the glare of the great city to this silent and dark little thoroughfare, dismissed the carriage at the foot, climbed up an old-fashioned oak staircase, and found themselves at last received by an elderly person, who looked a good deal more like a bronzed old veteran than an ordinary English butler.

"Halloo, Waters!" said Lord Evelyn. "How are you? I don't think I have seen you since you threatened to murder the landlord at Cairo."

"No, my lord," said Mr. Waters, who seemed vastly pleased by this reminiscence, and who instantly disappeared to summon dinner for the two young men.

"Extraordinary?" said Brand, when they had got seated at table. "Oh no; my constant craving is for air, space, light and quiet. Here I have all these. Beneath are the Embankment gardens; beyond that, you see, the river—those lights are the steamers at anchor. As for quiet, the lower floors are occupied by a charitable society; so I fancied there would not be much traffic on the stairs."

The jibe passed unheeded; Lord Evelyn had long ago become familiar with his friend's way of speaking about men and things.

"And so, Evelyn, you have become a pupil of the revolutionaries," George Brand continued, when Waters had put some things before them and retired—"a student of the fine art of stabbing people unawares? What an astute fellow that Lind must be—I will swear it never occurred to one of the lot before—to get an English milord into their ranks! A stroke of genius! It could only have been projected by a great mind. And then look at the effect throughout Europe if an English milord were to be found with a parcel of Orsini bombs in his possession! every ragamuffin from Naples to St. Petersburg would rejoice; the army of cutthroats would march with a new swagger."

His companion said nothing; but there was a vexed and impatient look on his face.

"And our little daughter—is she pretty? Does she coax the young men to play with daggers?—the innocent little thing! And when you start with your dynamite to break open a jail, she blows you a kiss?—the charming little fairy! What

is it she has embroidered on the ribbons round her neck?—*'Mort aux rois?'* *'Sic semper tyrannis?'* No; I saw a much prettier one somewhere the other day: *'Ne si pasce di fresche ruggiade, ma di sangue di membra di re.'* Isn't it charming? It sounds quite idyllic, even in English: *'Not for you the nourishment of freshening dews, but the blood of the limbs of kings!'* The pretty little stabber—is she fierce?"

"Brand, you are too bad!" said the other, throwing down his knife and fork, and getting up from the table. "You believe in neither man, woman, God, nor devil!"

"Would you mind handing over that claret jug?"

"Why," he said, turning passionately toward him, "it is men like you, who have neither faith, nor hope, nor regret, who are wandering aimlessly in a nightmare of apathy and indolence and indifference, who ought to be the first to welcome the new light breaking in the sky. What is life worth to you? You have nothing to hope for—nothing to look forward to—nothing you can kill the aimless with. Why should you desire to-morrow? To-morrow will bring you nothing different from yesterday; you will do as you did yesterday and the day before yesterday. It is the life of a horse or an ox—not the life of a human being, with the sympathies and needs and aspirations of a man. What is the object of living at all?"

"I really don't know," said the other, simply.

But this pale hump-backed lad, with the fine nostrils, the sensitive mouth, the large forehead, and the beautiful eyes, was terribly in earnest. He forgot about his place at table. He kept walking up and down, occasionally addressing his friend directly, at other times glancing out at the dark river and the golden lines of the lamps. And he was an eloquent speaker, too. Debarred from most forms of physical exercise, he had been brought up in a world of ideas. When he went to Oxford, it was with some vague notion of subsequently entering the Church; but at Oxford he became speedily convinced that there was no Church left for him to enter. Then he fell back on æstheticism—worshipped Carpaccio, adored Chopin, and turned his rooms at Merton into a museum of old tapestry, Roman brass-work, and Venetian glass. Then he dabbled a little in Comtism; but very soon he threw aside that gigantic make-believe at believing. Nevertheless, whatever was his whim of the moment, it was for him no whim at all, but a burning reality. And in this enthusiasm of his there was no room left for shyness. In fact, these two companions had been accustomed to talk

frankly; they had long ago abandoned that self-consciousness which ordinarily restricts the conversation of young Englishmen to monosyllables. Brand was a good listener and his friend an eager, impetuous, enthusiastic speaker. The one could even recite verses to the other: what greater proof of confidence?

And on this occasion all this prayer of his was earnest and pathetic enough. He begged this old chum of his to throw aside his insular prejudices and judge for himself. What object had he in living at all, if life were merely a routine of food and sleep? In this selfish isolation, his living was only a process of going to the grave—only that each day would become more tedious and burdensome as he grew older. Why should he not examine, and inquire, and believe—if that was possible? The world was perishing for want of a new faith: the new faith was here.

At this phrase George Brand quickly raised his head. He was accustomed to these enthusiasms of his friend; but he had not yet seen him in the character of an apostle.

“You know it as well as I, Brand; the last great wave of religion has spent itself; and I suppose Matthew Arnold would have us wait for the mysterious East, the mother of religions, to send us another. Do you remember ‘Obermann?’—

“ ‘In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,
The Roman noble lay;
He drove abroad, in furious guise,
Along the Appian Way;

“ ‘He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
And crowned his head with flowers—
No easier nor no quicker passed
The impracticable hours.

“ ‘The brooding East with awe beheld
Her impious younger world.
The Roman tempest swelled and swelled,
And on her head was hurled.

“ ‘The East bowed low before the blast,
In patience, deep disdain;
She let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again.”

The lad had a sympathetic voice; and there was a curious, pathetic thrill in the tones of it as he went on to describe the result of that awful musing—the new-born joy awakening in the East—the victorious West veiling her eagles and snap-

ping her sword before this strange new worship of the Child—

“And centuries came, and ran their course,
And, unspent all that time,
Still, still went forth that Child's dear force,
And still was at its prime.”

But now—in these later days around us!—

“Now he is dead! Far hence He lies
In the lorn Syrian town;
And on his grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.”

The great divine wave had spent itself. But were we to sit supinely by—this was what he asked, though not precisely in these consecutive words, for sometimes he walked to and fro in his eagerness, and sometimes he ate a bit of bread, or sat down opposite his friend for the purpose of better confronting him—to wait for that distant and mysterious East to send us another revelation? Not so. Let the proud-spirited and courageous West, that had learned the teachings of Christianity but never yet applied them—let the powerful West establish a faith of her own: a faith in the future of humanity itself—a faith in future of recompense and atonement to the vast multitudes of mankind who had toiled so long and so grievously—a faith demanding instant action and endeavor and self-sacrifice from those who would be its first apostles.

“The complaining millions of men
Darken in labor and pain.”

And why should not this Christianity, that had so long been used to gild the thrones of kings and glorify the ceremonies of priests—that had so long been monopolized by the rich and the great and the strong, whom its Founder despised and denounced—why should it not at length come to the help of those myriads of the poor and the weak and the suffering, whose cry for help had been for so many centuries disregarded? Here was work for the idle, hope for the hopeless, a faith for them who were perishing for want of a faith.

“You say all this is vague—a vision—a sentiment?” he said, talking in the same eager way. “Then that is my fault. I cannot explain it all to you in a few words. But do not run away with the notion that it is mere words—a St. Simonian dream of perfectibility, or anything like that. It is practical;

it exists ; it is within reach of you. It is a definite and immense organization ; it may be young as yet, but it has courage and splendid aims ; and now, with a great work before it, it is eager for aid. You yourself, when you see a child run over, or a woman starving of hunger, or a blind man wanting to cross a street, are you not ready with your help—the help of your hands or of your purse ? Multiply these by millions, and think of the cry for help that comes from all parts of the world. If you but knew, you could not resist. I as yet know little—I only hear the echo of the cry ; but my veins are burning ; I shall have the gladness of answering ‘ Yes,’ however little I can do. And after all, is not that something ? For a man to live only for himself is death.”

“ But you know, Evelyn,” said his friend, though he did not quite know what to answer to all this outburst, “ you must be more cautious. Those benevolent schemes are very noble and very captivating ; but sometimes they are in the hands of rather queer people. And besides, do you quite know the limits of this big society ? I thought you said something about vindicating the oppressed. Does it include politics ? ”

“ I do not question ; I am content to obey,” said Lord Evelyn.

“ That is not English ; unreasoning and blind obedience is mere folly.”

“ Perhaps so,” said the other, somewhat absently ; “ but I suppose a man accepts whatever satisfies the craving of his own heart. And—and I should not like to go alone on this new thing, Brand. Will you not come some little way with me ? If you think I am mistaken, you may turn back ; as for me—well, if it were only a dream, I think I would rather go with the pilgrims on their hopeless quest than stay with the people who come out to wonder at them as they go by. You remember—

“ Who is your lady of love, oh ye that pass
Singing ? And is it for sorrow, of that which was
That ye sing sadly, or dream of what shall be ?
For gladly at once and sadly it seems ye sing.
—Our lady of love by you is unbeholden ;
For hands she hath none, nor eyes, nor lips, nor golden
Treasure of hair, nor face nor form ; but we
That love, we know her more fair than anything.”

Yes ; he had certainly a pathetic thrill in his voice ; but now there was something else—something strange—in the slow and monotonous cadence that caught the acute ear of

his friend. And again he went on, but absently, almost as if he were himself listening—

“—Is she a queen, having great gifts to give?
 —Yea, these; that whoso hath seen her shall not live
 Except he serve her sorrowing, with strange pain,
 Travail and bloodshedding and bitterest tears;
 And when she bids die he shall surely die.
 And he shall leave all things under the sky,
 And go forth naked under sun and rain,
 And work and wait and watch out all his years.”

“Evelyn,” said George Brand, suddenly, fixing his keen eyes on his friend’s face, “where have you heard that? Who has taught you? You are not speaking with your own voice.”

“With whose, then?” and a smile came over the pale, calm, beautiful face, as if he had awakened out of a dream.

“That,” said Brand, still regarding him, “was the voice of Natalie Lind.”

CHAPTER III.

IN A HOUSE IN CURZON STREET.

ARMED with a defiant scepticism, and yet conscious of an unusual interest and expectation, George Brand drove up to Curzon Street on the following evening. As he jumped out of his hansom, he inadvertently glanced at the house.

“Conspiracy has not quite built us a palace as yet,” he said to himself.

The door was opened by a little German maid-servant, as neat and round and rosy as a Dresden china shepherdess, who conducted him up-stairs and announced him at the drawing-room. It was not a large room; but there was more of color and gilding in it than accords with the severity of modern English taste; and it was lit irregularly with a number of candles, each with a little green or rose-red shade. Mr. Lind met him at the door. As they shook hands, Brand caught a glimpse of another figure in the room—apparently that of a tall woman dressed all in cream-white, with a bunch of scarlet geraniums in her bosom, and another in her raven-black hair.

“Not the gay little adventuress, then?” was his instant and internal comment. “Better contrived still. The inspired

prophetess. Obviously not the daughter of this man at all. Hired."

But when Natalie Lind came forward to receive him, he was more than surprised; he was almost abashed. During a second or two of wonder and involuntary admiration, he was startled out of his critical attitude altogether. For this tall and striking figure was in reality that of a young girl of eighteen or nineteen, who had the beautifully formed bust, the slender waist, and the noble carriage that even young Hungarian girls frequently have. Perhaps the face, with its intellectual forehead and the proud and firmly cut mouth, was a trifle too calm and self-reliant for a young girl; but all the softness of expression that was wanted, all the gentle and gracious timidity that we associate with maidenhood, lay in the large, and dark, and lustrous eyes. When, by accident, she turned aside, and he saw the outline of that clear, olive-complexioned face, only broken by the outward curve of the long black lashes, he had to confess to himself that, adventuress or no adventuress, prophetess or no prophetess, Natalie Lind was possessed of about the most beautiful profile he had ever beheld, while she had the air and the bearing of a queen.

Her father and he talked of the various trifling things of the moment; but what he was chiefly thinking of was the singular calm and self-possession of this young girl. When she spoke, her dark, soft eyes regarded him without fear. Her manner was simple and natural to the last degree; perhaps with the least touch added of maidenly reserve. He was forced even to admire the simplicity of her dress—cream or canary white it was, with a bit of white fur round the neck and round the tight wrists. The only strong color was that of the scarlet geraniums which she wore in her bosom, and in the splendid masses of her hair; and the vertical sharp line of scarlet of her closed fan.

Once only, during this interval of waiting, did he find that calm serenity of hers disturbed. He happened to observe the photograph of a very handsome woman near him on the table. She told him she had had a parcel of photographs of friends of hers just sent over from Vienna; some of them very pretty. She went to another table, and brought over a handful. He glanced at them only a second or two.

"I see they are mostly from Vienna; are they Austrian ladies?" he asked.

"They live in Austria, but they are not Austrians," she answered. And then she added, with a touch of scorn about

the beautiful mouth, "Our friends and we don't belong to the women-floggers!"

"Natalie!" her father said; but he smiled all the same.

"I will tell you one of my earliest recollections," she said: "I remember it very well. Kossuth was carrying me round the room on his shoulder. I suppose I had been listening to the talk of the gentlemen; for I said to him, 'When they burned my papa in effigy at Pesth, why was I not allowed to go and see?' And he said—I remember the sound of his voice even now—'Little child, you were not born then. But if you had been able to go, do you know what they would have done to you? They would have flogged you. Do you not know that the Austrians flog women? When you grow up, little child, your papa will tell you the story of Madame von Maderspach.'" Then she added, "That is one of my valued recollections, that when I was a child I was carried on Kossuth's shoulders."

"You have no similar reminiscence of Gorgey, I suppose?" Brand said, with a smile.

He had spoken quite inadvertently, without the slightest thought in the world of wounding her feelings. But he was surprised and shocked by the extraordinary effect which this chance remark produced on the tall and beautiful girl standing there; for an instant she paused, as if not knowing what to say. Then she said proudly, and she turned away as she did so,

"Perhaps you are not aware that there are some names you should not mention in the presence of a Hungarian woman."

What was there in the tone of the voice that made him rapidly glance at her eyes, as she turned away, pretending to carry back the photographs? He was not deceived. Those large dark eyes were full of sudden, indignant tears; she had not turned quite quickly enough to conceal them.

Of course, he instantly and amply apologized for his ignorance and stupidity; but what he said to himself was, "That child is not acting. She may be Lind's daughter, after all. Poor thing! she is too beautiful, and generous, and noble to be made the decoy of a revolutionary adventurer."

At this moment Lord Evelyn arrived, throwing a quick glance of inquiry toward his friend, to see what impression, so far, had been produced. But the tall, red-bearded Englishman maintained, as the diplomatists say, an attitude of, the strictest reserve. The keen gray eyes were respectful

attentive, courteous—especially when they were turned to Miss Lind; beyond that, nothing.

Now they had not been seated at the dinner-table more than a few minutes before George Brand began to ask himself whether it was really Curzon Street he was dining in. The oddly furnished room was adorned with curiosities to which every capital in Europe would seem to have contributed. The servants, exclusively women, were foreign; the table glass and decorations were all foreign; the unostentatious little banquet was distinctly foreign. Why, the very bell that had summoned them down—what was there in the soft sound of it that had reminded him of something far away? It was a haunting sound, and he kept puzzling over the vague association it seemed to call up. At last he frankly mentioned the matter to Miss Lind, who seemed greatly pleased.

“Ah, did you like the sound?” she said, in that low and harmonious voice of hers. “The bell was an invention of my own; shall I show it to you?”

The Dresden shepherdess, by name Anneli, being despatched into the hall, presently returned with an object somewhat resembling in shape a Cheshire cheese, but round at the top, formed of roughly filed metal or a lustrous yellow-gray. Round the rude square handle surmounting it was carelessly twisted a bit of old orange silk; other decoration there was none.

“Do you see what it is now?” she said. “Only one of the great bells the people use for the cattle on the Campagna. Where did I get it? Oh, you know the Piazza Montenara, in Rome, of course? There is a place there where they sell such things to the country people. You could get one without difficulty, if you are not afraid of being laughed at as a mad Englishman. That bit of embroidered ribbon, though, I got in an old shop in Florence.”

Indeed, what struck him further was, not only the foreign look of the little room and its belongings, but also the extraordinary familiarity with foreign cities shown by both Lind and his daughter. As the rambling conversation went on (the sonorous cattle-bell had been removed by the rosy-cheeked Anneli), they appeared to be just as much at home in Madrid, in Munich, in Turin, or Genoa as in London. And it was no vague and general tourist's knowledge that these two cosmopolitans showed; it was rather the knowledge of a resident—an intimate acquaintance with persons, streets, shops, and houses. George Brand was a bit of a globe-trot-

ter himself, and was entirely interested in this talk about places and things that he knew. He got to be quite at home with those people, whose own home seemed to be Europe. Reminiscences, anecdotes flowed freely on ; the dinner passed with unconscious rapidity. Lord Evelyn was delighted and pleased beyond measure to observe the more than courteous attention that his friend paid to Natalie Lind.

But all this while what mention was there of the great and wonderful organization—a mere far-off glimpse of which had so captured Lord Evelyn's fervent imagination? Not a word. The sceptic who had come among them could find nothing either to justify or allay his suspicions. But it might safely be said that, for the moment at least, his suspicions as regarded one of those two were dormant. It was difficult to associate trickery, and conspiracy, and cowardly stabbing, with this beautiful young Hungarian girl, whose calm, dark eyes were so fearless. It is true that she appeared very proud-spirited, and generous, and enthusiastic ; and you could cause her cheek to pale whenever you spoke of injury done to the weak, or the suffering, or the poor. But that was different from the secret sharpening of poniards.

Once only was reference made to the various secret associations that are slowly but eagerly working under the apparent social and political surface of Europe. Some one mentioned the Nihilists. Thereupon Ferdinand Lind, in a quiet and matter-of-fact way, without appearing to know anything of the *personnel* of the society, and certainly without expressing any approval of its aims, took occasion to speak of the extraordinary devotion of those people.

"There has been nothing like it," said he, "in all the history of what men have done for a political cause. You may say they are fanatics, madmen, murderers ; that they only provoke further tyranny and oppression ; that their efforts are wholly and solely mischievous. It may be so ; but I speak of the individual and what he is ready to do. The sacrifice of their own life is taken almost as a matter of course. Each man knows that for him the end will almost certainly be Siberia or a public execution ; and he accepts it. You will find young men, well-born, well-educated, who go away from their friends and their native place, who go into a remote village, and offer to work at the commonest trade, at apprentices' wages. They settle there ; they marry ; they preach nothing but the value of honest work, and extreme sobriety, and respect for superiors. Then, after some years, when they are regarded as beyond all suspicion, they begin,

cautiously and slowly, to spread abroad their propaganda—to teach respect rather for human liberty, for justice, for self-sacrifice, for those passions that prompt a nation to adventure everything for its freedom. Well, you know the end. The man may be found out—banished or executed; but the association remains. The Russians at this moment have no notion how wide-spread and powerful it is.”

“The head-quarters, are they in Russia itself?” asked Brand, on the watch for any admission.

“Who knows?” said the other, absently. “Perhaps there are none.”

“None? Surely there must be some power to say what is to be done, to enforce obedience?”

“What if each man finds that in himself?” said Lind, with something of the air of a dreamer coming over the firm and thoughtful and rugged face. “It may be a brotherhood. All associations do not need to be controlled by kings and priests and standing armies.”

“And the end of all this devotion, you say is Siberia or death?”

“For the man, perhaps; for his work, not. It is not personal gain or personal safety that a man must have in view if he goes to do battle against the oppression that has crushed the world for centuries and centuries. Do you not remember the answer given to the Czar by Michael Bestoujif when he was condemned? It was only the saying of a peasant; but it is one of the noblest ever heard in the world. ‘I have the power to pardon you,’ said the Czar to him, ‘and I would do so if I thought you would become a faithful subject.’ What was the answer? ‘Sire,’ said Michael Bestoujif, ‘that is our great misfortune, that the Emperor can do everything, and that there is no law.’”

“Ah, the brave man!” said Natalie Lind, quickly and passionately, with a flash of pride in her eyes. “The brave man! If I had a brother, I would ask him, ‘When will you show the courage of Michael Bestoujif?’”

Lord Evelyn glanced at her with a strange, admiring, proud look. “If she had a brother!” What else, even with all his admiration and affection for her, could he hope to be?

Presently they wandered back into other and lighter subjects; and Brand, at least, did not notice how the time was flying. When Natalie Lind rose, and asked her father whether he would have coffee sent into the smoking-room, or have tea in the drawing-room, Brand was quite astonished

and disappointed to find it so late. He proposed they should at once go up to the drawing-room; and this was done.

They had been speaking of musical instruments at dinner; and their host now brought them some venerable lutes to examine—curiosities only, for most of the metal strings were broken. Beautiful objects, however, they were, in inlaid ivory or tortoise-shell and ebony; made, as the various inscriptions revealed, at Bologna, or Padua, or Venice; and dating, some of them, as far back as 1474. But in the midst of all this, Brand espied another instrument on one of the small tables.

“Miss Lind,” said he, with some surprise, “do you play the zither?”

“Oh yes, Natalie will play you something,” her father said, carelessly; and forthwith the girl sat down to the small table.

George Brand retired into a corner of the room. He was passionately fond of zither music. He thought no more about that examination of the lutes.

“*Do you know one who can play the zither well?*” says the proverb. “*If so, rejoice, for there are not two in the world.*” However that might be, Natalie Lind could play the zither, as one eager listener soon discovered. He, in that far corner, could only see the profile of the girl (just touched with a faint red from the shade of the nearest candle, as she leaned over the instrument), and the shapely wrists and fingers as they moved on the metallic strings. But was that what he really did see when the first low tremulous notes struck the prelude to one of the old pathetic *Volkslieder* that many a time he had heard in the morning, when the fresh wind blew in from the pines; that many a time he had heard in the evening, when the little blue-eyed Kathchen and her mother sung together as they sat and knitted on the bench in front of the inn? Suddenly the air changes. What is this louder tramp? Is it not the joyous chorus of the home-returning huntsmen; the lads with the slain roedeer slung round their necks; that stalwart Bavarian keeper hauling at his mighty black hound; old father Keinitz, with his three beagles and his ancient breech-loader, hurrying forward to get the first cool, vast, splendid bath of the clear, white wine? How the young fellows come swinging along through the dust, their faces ablaze against the sunset! Listen to the far, hoarse chorus!—

"Dann kehr' ich von der Haide,
 Zur hauslich stillen Freude,
 Ein frommer Jagersmann!
 Ein frommer Jagersmann!
 Halli, hallo! halli, hallo!
 Ein frommer Jagersmann!"

White wine now, and likewise the richer red!—for there is a great hand-shaking because of the Mr. Englishman's good fortune in having shot three bucks; and the little Kathchen's eyes grow full, because they have brought home a gentle-faced hind, likewise cruelly slain. And Kathchen's mother has whisked inside, and here are the tall schoppen on the table; and speedily the long, low room is filled with the tobacco-smoke. What! another song, you thirsty old Keinitz, with the quavering voice? But there is a lusty chorus to that too; and a great clinking of glasses; and the Englishman laughs and does his part too, and he has called for six more schoppen of red. . . . But hush, now! Have we come out from the din and the smoke to the cool evening air? What is that one hears afar in the garden? Surely it is the little Kathchen and her mother singing together, in beautiful harmony, the old, familiar, tender *Lorelei*! The zither is a strange instrument—it speaks. And when Natalie Lind, coming to this air, sung in a low contralto voice an only half-suggested second, it seemed to those in the room that two women were singing—the one with a voice low and rich and penetrating, the other voice clear and sweet like the singing of a young girl. "*Die Luft ist kuhl und es dunkelt, und ruhig fliesset der Rhein.*" Was it, indeed, Kathchen and her mother? Were they far away in the beautiful pine-land, with the quiet evening shining red over the green woods, and darkness coming over the pale streams in the hollows? When Natalie Lind ceased, the elder of the two guests murmured to himself, "Wonderful! wonderful!" The other did not speak at all.

She rested her hands for a moment on the table.

"Natalushka," said her father, "is that all?"

"I will not be called Natalushka, papa," said she; but again she bent her hands over the silver strings.

And these brighter and gayer airs now—surely they are from the laughing and light-hearted South? Have we not heard them under the cool shade of the olive-trees, with the hot sun blazing on the garden-paths of the Villa Reale; and the children playing; and the band busy with its dancing *canzoni*, the gay notes drowning the murmur and plash of the

fountains near? Look now!—far beneath the gray shadow of the olive-trees—the deep blue band of the sea; and there the double-sailed barca, like a yellow butterfly hovering on the water; and there the large martingallo, bound for the cloud-like island on the horizon. Are they singing, then, as they speed over the glancing waves? “*O dolce Napoli! O suol beato!*” for what can they sing at all, as they leave us, if they do not sing the pretty, tender, tinkling “*Santa Lucia?*”

“Venite all’ agile
Barchetta mia!
Santa Lucia!
Santa Lucia!”

. . . . The notes grow fainter and fainter. Are the tall maidens of Capri already looking out for the swarthy sailors, that these turn no longer to the shores they are leaving? “*O dolce Napoli! O suol beato!*” Fainter and fainter grow the notes on the trembling string, so that you can scarcely tell them from the cool plashing of the fountains. . . . “*Santa Lucia! Santa Lucia!*”

“Natalushka,” said her father, laughing, “you must take us to Venice now.”

The young Hungarian girl rose, and put the zither aside.

“It is an amusement for the children,” she said.

She went to the piano, which was open, and took down a piece of music—it was Kücken’s “Maid of Judah.” Now, hitherto, George Brand had only heard her murmur a low, harmonious second to one or other of the airs she had been playing; and he was quite unprepared for the passion and fervor which her rich, deep, resonant, contralto voice threw into this wail of indignation and despair. This was the voice of a woman, not of a girl; and it was with the proud passion of a woman that she seemed to send this cry to Heaven for reparation, and justice, and revenge. And surely it was not only of the sorrows of the land of Judah she was thinking!—it was a wider cry—the cry of the oppressed, and the suffering, and the heart-broken in every clime—

“O blest native land! O fatherland mine!
How long for thy refuge in vain shall I pine?”

He could have believed there were tears in her eyes just then; but there were none, he knew, when she came to the fierce piteous appeal that followed—

"Where, where are thy proud sons, so lordly in might?
All mown down and fallen in blood-welling fight!
Thy cities are ruin, thy valleys lie waste,
Their summer enchantment the foe hath erased.
O blest native land! how long shalt decline?
When, when will the Lord cry, 'Revenge, it is Mine!'"

The zither speaks; but there is a speech beyond that of the zither. The penetrating vibration of this rich and pathetic voice was a thing not easily to be forgotten. When the two friends left the house, they found themselves in the chill darkness of an English night in February. Surely it must have seemed to them that they had been dwelling for a period in warmer climes, with gay colors, and warmth, and sweet sounds around them. They walked for some time in silence.

"Well," said Lord Evelyn, at last, "what do you think of them?"

"I don't know," said the other, after a pause. "I am puzzled. How did you come to know them?"

"I came to know Lind through a newspaper reporter called O'Halloran. I should like to introduce you to him too."

George Brand soon afterward parted from his friend, and walked away down to his silent rooms over the river. The streets were dark and deserted, and the air was still; yet there seemed somehow to be a tremulous, passionate, distant sound in the night. It was no tinkling "Santa Lucia" dying away over the blue seas in the south. It was no dull, sonorous bell, suggesting memories of the far Campagna. Was it not rather the quick, responsive echo that had involuntarily arisen in his own heart, when he heard Natalie Lind's thrilling voice pour forth that proud and indignant appeal,

"When, when will the Lord cry, 'Revenge, it is Mine!'"

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGER.

FERDINAND LIND was in his study, busy with his morning letters. It was a nondescript little den, which he also used as library and smoking-room; its chief feature being a collection of portraits—a most heterogeneous assortment of engravings, photographs, woodcuts, and terra-cotta busts. Wherever the book-shelves ceased, these began; and as there were

a great number of them, and as the room was small, Mr. Lind's friends or historical heroes sometimes came into odd juxtaposition. In any case, they formed a strange assemblage—Arndt and Korner; Stein; Silvio Pellico and Karl Sand cheek by jowl; Pestal, Comte, Cromwell, Garibaldi, Marx, Mazzini, Bem, Kossuth, Lassalle, and many another writer and fighter. A fine engraving of Napoleon as First Consul was hung over the mantel-piece, a pipe-rack intervening between it and a fac-simile of the warrant for the execution of Charles I.

Something in his correspondence had obviously annoyed the occupant of this little study. His brows were bent down, and he kept his foot nervously and impatiently tapping on the floor. When some one knocked, he said, "Come in!" almost angrily, though he must have known who was his visitor.

"Good-morning, papa!" said the tall Hungarian girl, coming into the room with a light step and a smile of welcome on her face.

"Good-morning, Natalie!" said he, without looking up. "I am busy this morning."

"Oh, but, papa," said she, going over, and stooping down and kissing him, "you must let me come and thank you for the flowers. They are more beautiful than ever this time."

"What flowers?" said he, impatiently.

"Why," she said, with a look of astonishment, "have you forgotten already? The flowers you always send for my birthday morning."

But instantly she changed her tone.

"Ah! I see. Good little children must not ask where the fairy gifts come from. There, I will not disturb you, papa."

She touched his shoulder caressingly as she passed.

"But thank you again, papa Santa Claus."

At breakfast, Ferdinand-Lind seemed to have entirely recovered his good-humor.

"I had forgotten for the moment it was your birthday, Natalie," said he. "You are quite a grown woman now."

Nothing, however, was said about the flowers, though the beautiful basket stood on a side-table, filling the room with its perfume. After breakfast, Mr. Lind left for his office, his daughter setting about her domestic duties.

At twelve o'clock she was ready to go out for her accustomed morning walk. The pretty little Anneli, her companion on these excursions, was also ready; and together they set forth. They chatted frankly together in German—the

ordinary relations between mistress and servant never having been properly established in this case. For one thing, they had been left to depend on each other's society during many a long evening in foreign towns, when Mr. Lind was away on his own business. For another, Natalie Lind had, somehow or other, and quite unaided, arrived at the daring conclusion that servants were human beings; and she had been taught to regard human beings as her brothers and sisters, some more fortunate than others, no doubt, but the least fortunate having the greatest claim on her.

"Fraulein," said the little Saxon maid, "it was I myself who took in the beautiful flowers that came for you this morning."

"Yes?"

"Yes, indeed; and I thought it was very strange for a lady to be out so early in the morning."

"A lady!" said Natalie Lind, with a quick surprise. "Not dressed all in black?"

"Yes, indeed, she was dressed all in black."

The girl was silent for a second or two. Then she said, with a smile,

"It is not right for my father to send me a black messenger on my birthday—it is not a good omen. And it was the same last year when we were in Paris; the *concierge* told me. Birthday gifts should come with a white fairy, you know, Anneli—all silver and bells."

"Fraulein," said the little German girl, gravely, "I do not think the lady who came this morning would bring you any ill fortune, for she spoke with such gentleness when she asked about you."

"When she asked about me? What was she like, then, this black messenger?"

"How could I see, Fraulein?—her veil was so thick. But her hair was gray; I could see that. And she had a beautiful figure—not quite as tall as you, Fraulein; I watched her as she went away."

"I am not sure that it is safe, Anneli, to watch the people whom Santa Claus sends," the young mistress said, lightly. "However, you have not told me what the strange lady said to you."

"That will I now tell you, Fraulein," said the other, with an air of importance. "Well, when I heard the knock at the door, I went instantly; I thought it was strange to hear a knock so early, instead of the bell. Then there was the lady; and she did not ask who lived there, but she said, 'Miss Lind

is not up yet? But then, Fraulein; you must understand, she did not speak like that, for it was in English, and she spoke very slowly, as if it was with difficulty. I would have said, 'Will the *gnadige Frau* be pleased to speak German?' but I was afraid it might be impertinent for a maid-servant to address a lady so. Besides, Fraulein, she might have been a French lady, and not able to understand our German."

"Quite so, Anneli. Well?"

"Then I told her I believed you were still in your room. Then she said, still speaking very slowly, as if it was all learned, 'Will you be so kind as to put those flowers just outside her room, so that she will get them when she comes out?' And I said I would do that. Then she said, 'I hope Miss Lind is very well;' and I said, 'Oh yes.' She stood for a moment just then, Fraulein, as if not knowing whether to go away or not; and then she asked again if you were quite well and strong and cheerful, and again I said, 'Oh yes;' and no sooner had I said that than she put something into my hand and went away. Would you believe it, Fraulein? it was a sovereign—an English golden sovereign. And so I ran after her and said, 'Lady, this is a mistake,' and I offered her the sovereign. That was right, was it not, Fraulein?"

"Certainly."

"Well, she did not speak to me at all this time. I think the poor lady has less English even than I myself; but she closed my hand over the sovereign, and then patted me on the arm, and went away. It was then that I looked after her. I said to myself, 'Well, there is only one lady that I know who has a more beautiful figure than that—that is my mistress.' But she was not so tall as you, Fraulein."

Natalie Lind paid no attention to this adroit piece of flattery on the part of her little Saxon maid.

"It is very extraordinary, Anneli," she said, after awhile; then she added, "I hope the piece of gold you have will not turn to dust and ashes."

"Look at it, Fraulein," said Anneli, taking out her purse and producing a sound and solid English coin, about which there appeared to be no demonology or witchcraft whatsoever.

They had by this time got into Park Lane; and here the young mistress's speculations about the mysterious messenger of Santa Claus were suddenly cut short by something more immediate and more practical. There was a small boy of about ten engaged in pulling a wheelbarrow which was heavily laden with large baskets—probably containing washing; and he was toiling manfully with a somewhat hopeless task.

How he had got so far it was impossible to say; but now that his strength was exhausted, he was trying all sorts of ineffectual dodges—even tilting up the barrow and endeavoring to haul it by the legs—to get the thing along.

"If I were a man," said Natalie Lind, "I would help that boy."

Then she stepped from the pavement.

"Little boy," she said, "where are you taking that barrow?"

The London *gamin*, always on the watch for sarcasm, stopped and stared at her. Then he took off his cap and wiped his forehead; it was warm work, though this was a chill February morning. Finally he said,

"Well, I'm agoin' to Warrington Crescent, Maida Vale. But if it's when I am likely to git there—bust me if I know."

She looked about. There was a good, sturdy specimen of the London loafer over at the park railings, with both hands up at his mouth, trying to light his pipe. She went across to him.

"I will give you half a crown if you will pull that barrow to Warrington Crescent, Maida Vale." There was no hesitation in her manner; she looked the loafer fair in the face.

He instantly took the pipe from his mouth, and made some slouching attempt at touching his cap.

"Thank ye, miss. Thank ye kindly"—and away the barrow went, with the small boy manfully pushing behind.

The tall, black-eyed Hungarian girl and her rosy-cheeked attendant now turned into the Park. There were a good many people riding by—fathers with their daughters, elderly gentlemen very correctly dressed, smart young men with a little tawny mustache, clear blue eyes, and square shoulders.

"Many of those Englishmen are very handsome," said the young mistress, by chance.

"Not like the Austrians, Fraulein," said Anneli.

"The Austrians? What do you know about the Austrians?" said the other, sharply.

"When my uncle was ill at Prague, Fraulein," the girl said, "my mother took me there to see him. We used to go out to the river, and go half-way over the tall bridge, and then down to the 'Sofien-Insel.' Ah, the beautiful place!—with the music, and the walks under the trees; and there we used to see the Austrian officers. These *were* handsome, with there beautiful uniforms, and waists like a girl; and the beautiful gloves they wore, too!—even when they were smoking cigarettes."

Natalie Lind was apparently thinking of other things. She neither rebuked nor approved Anneli's speech ; though it was hard that the little Saxon maid should have preferred to the sturdy, white-haired, fair-skinned warriors of her native land the elegant young gentlemen of Francis Joseph's army.

"They are handsome, those Englishmen," Natalie Lind was saying, almost to herself, "and very rich and brave ; but they have no sympathy. All their fighting for their liberty is over and gone ; they cannot believe there is any oppression now anywhere ; and they think that those who wish to help the sufferers of the world are only discontented and fanatic—a trouble—an annoyance. And they are hard with the poor people and the weak ; they think it is wrong—that you have done wrong—if you are not well off and strong like themselves. I wonder if that was really an English lady who wrote the 'Cry of the Children.'"

"I beg your pardon, Fraulein."

"Nothing, Anneli. I was wondering why so rich a nation as the English should have so many poor people among them—and such miserable poor people ; there is nothing like it in the world."

They were walking along the broad road leading to the Marble Arch, between the leafless trees. Suddenly the little Saxon girl exclaimed, in an excited whisper,

"Fraulein! Fraulein!"

"What is it, Anneli?"

"The lady—the lady who came with the flowers—she is behind us. Yes ; I am sure."

The girl's mistress glanced quickly round. Some distance behind them there was certainly a lady dressed altogether in black, who, the moment she perceived that these two were regarding her, turned aside, and pretended to pick up something from the grass.

"Fraulein, Fraulein," said Anneli, eagerly ; "let us sit down on this seat. Do not look at her. She will pass."

The sudden presence of this stranger, about whom she had been thinking so much, had somewhat unnerved her ; she obeyed this suggestion almost mechanically ; and waited with her heart throbbing. For an instant or two it seemed as if that dark figure along by the trees were inclined to turn and leave ; but presently Natalie Lind knew rather than saw that this slender and graceful woman with the black dress and the deep veil was approaching her. She came nearer ; for a second she came closer ; some little white thing was dropped into the girl's lap, and the stranger passed quickly on.

"Anneli, Anneli," the young mistress said, "the lady has dropped her locket! Run with it—quick!"

"No, Fraulein," said the other, quite as breathlessly, "she meant it for you. Oh, look, Fraulein!—look at the poor lady—she is crying."

The sharp eyes of the younger girl were right. Surely that slender figure was being shaken with sobs as it hurried away and was lost among the groups coming through the Marble Arch! Natalie Lind sat there as one stupefied—breathless, silent, trembling. She had not looked at the locket at all.

"Anneli," she said, in a low voice, "was that the same lady? Are you sure?"

"Certain, Fraulein," said her companion, eagerly.

"She must be very unhappy," said the girl. "I think, too, she was crying."

Then she looked at the trinket that the stranger had dropped into her lap. It was an old-fashioned silver locket formed in the shape of a heart, and ornamented with the most delicate filagree work; in the centre of it was the letter N in old German text. When Natalie Lind opened it, she found inside only a small piece of paper, on which was written, in foreign-looking characters, "*From Natalie to Natalushka.*"

"Anneli, she knows my name!" the girl exclaimed.

"Would you not like to speak to the poor lady, Fraulien?" said the little German maid, who was very much excited, too. "And do you not think she is sure to come this way again—to morrow, next day, some other day? Perhaps she is ill or suffering, or she may have lost some one whom you resemble—how can one tell?"

CHAPTER V.

PIONEERS.

BEFORE sitting down to breakfast, on this dim and dreary morning in February, George Brand went to one of the windows of his sitting-room and looked abroad on the busy world without. Busy indeed it seemed to be—the steamers hurrying up and down the river, hansoms whirling along the Embankment, heavily laden omnibuses chasing each other across Waterloo Bridge, the underground railway from time to time rumbling beneath those wintry-looking gardens, and always and everywhere the ceaseless murmur of a great city. In the midst of all this eager activity, he was only a spectator. Busv

enough the world around him seemed to be ; he alone was idle.

Well, what had he to look forward to on this dull day, when once he had finished his breakfast and his newspapers ? It had already begun to drizzle ; there was to be no saunter up to the park. He would stroll along to his club, and say " Good morning " to one or two acquaintances. Perhaps he would glance at some more newspapers. Perhaps, tired of reading news that did not interest, and forming opinions never to be translated into action, he would take refuge in the library. Somehow, anyhow, he would desperately tide over the morning till lunch-time.

Luncheon would be a break ; but after——? He had not been long enough in England to become familiar with the whist-set ; similarly, he had been too long abroad to be proficient in English billiards, even if he had been willing to make either whist or pool the pursuit of his life. As for afternoon calls and tea-drinking, that may be an interesting occupation for young gentlemen in search of a wife, but it is too ghastly a business for one who has no such views. What then ? More newspapers ? More tedious lounging in the hushed library ? Or how were the " impracticable hours " to be disposed of before came night and sleep ?

George Brand did not stay to consider that, when a man in the prime of health and vigor, possessed of an ample fortune, unfettered by anybody's will but his own, and burdened by neither remorse nor regret, nevertheless begins to find life a thing too tedious to be borne, there must be a cause for it. On the contrary, instead of asking himself any questions, he set about getting through the daily programme with an Englishman's determination to be prepared for the worst. He walked up to his club, the Waldegrave, in Pall Mall. In the morning-room there were only two or three old gentlemen, seated in easy-chairs near the fire, and grumbling in a loud voice—for apparently one or two were rather deaf—about the weather. Brand glanced at a few more newspapers. Then a happy idea occurred to him ; he would go up to the smoking-room and smoke a cigarette.

In this vast hall of a place there were only two persons—one standing with his back to the fire, the other lying back in an easy-chair. The one was a florid, elderly gentleman, who was first cousin to a junior Lord of the Treasury, and therefore claimed to be a profound authority on politics, home and foreign. He was a harmless poor devil enough, from whom a merciful Providence had concealed the fact that his

brain-power was of the smallest. His companion, reclining in the easy-chair, was a youthful Fine Art Professor; a gelatinous creature, a bundle of languid affectations, with the added and fluttering self-consciousness of a school-miss. He was absently assenting to the propositions of the florid gentleman; but it is probable that his soul was elsewhere.

These propositions were to the effect that leading articles in a newspaper were a mere impertinence; that he himself never read such things; that the business of a newspaper was to supply news; and that an intelligent Englishman was better capable of forming a judgment on public affairs than the hacks of a newspaper-office. The intelligent Englishman then proceeded to deliver his own judgment on the question of the day, which turned out to be—to Mr. Brand's great surprise—nothing more nor less than a blundering and inaccurate *resume* of the opinions expressed in a leading article in that morning's *Times*. At length this one-sided conversation between a jackanapes and a jackass became too intolerable for Brand, who threw away his cigarette, and descended once more into the hall.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, sir," said a boy; and at the same moment he caught sight of Lord Evelyn.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, hurrying forward to shake his friend by the hand. "Come, Evelyn, what are you up to? I can't stand England any longer; will you take a run with me?—Algiers, Egypt, anywhere you like. Let us drop down to Dover in the afternoon, and settle it there. Or what do you say to the Riviera? we should be sure to run against some people at one or other of the towns. Upon my life, if you had not turned up, I think I should have cut my throat before lunch-time."

"I have got something better for you to do than that," said the other; "I want you to see O'Halloran. Come along; I have a hansom here. We shall just catch him at Atkinson's, the book-shop, you know."

"Very well; all right," Brand said, briskly: this seemed to be rather a more cheerful business than cutting one's throat.

"He's at his telegraph-wire all night," Lord Evelyn said, in the hansom. "Then he lies down for a few hours' sleep on a sofa. Then he goes along to his rooms in Pimlico for breakfast; but at Atkinson's he generally stops for awhile on his way, to have his morning drink."

"Oh, is that the sort of person?"

"Don't make any mistake. O'Halloran may be eccentric

and he had two shots at them. Well, well, Orsini succeeded better."

"Succeeded?" said George Brand. "Do you call that success? He had the reward that he richly merited, at all events."

"You do not think he was successful?" he said, calmly. "Then you do not know how the kingdom of Italy came by its liberty. Who do you think was the founder of that kingdom of Italy?—which God preserve till it become something better than a kingdom! Not Cavour, with all his wiliness; not your Galantuomo, the warrior who wrote up Aspromonte in the face of all the world as the synonym for the gratitude of kings; not Garibaldi, who, in spite of Aspromonte, has become now merely the *concierge* to the House of Savoy. The founder of the kingdom of Italy was Felix Orsini—and whether heaven or hell contains him, I drink his health!"

He suited the action to the word. Brand looked on, not much impressed.

"That is all nonsense, O'Halloran!" Lord Evelyn said, bluntly.

"I tell you," O'Halloran said, with some vehemence, "that the 14th of January, 1858, kept Louis Napoleon in such a state of tremor, that he would have done a good deal more than lend his army to Sardinia to sweep the Austrians out rather than abandon himself to the fate that Cavour plainly and distinctly indicated. But for the threat of another dose of Orsini pills, do you think you would ever have heard of Magenta and Solferino?"

He seemed to rouse himself a bit now.

"No," he said, "I do not approve of assassination as a political weapon. It seldom answers. But it has always been the policy of absolute governments, and of their allies the priests and the police, to attribute any murders that might occur to the secret societies, and so to terrify stupid people. It is one of the commonest slanders in history. Why, everybody knows how Fouché humbugged the First Napoleon, and got up vague plots to prove that he, and he alone, knew what was going on. When Karl Sand killed Kotzebue—oh, of course, that was a fine excuse for the German kings and princes to have another raid against free speech, though Sand declared he had nothing in the world to do with either the Tugendbund or any such society. Who now believes that Young Italy killed Count Rossi? Rossi was murdered by the agents of the clericals; it was distinctly proved. But any stick is good enough to beat a dog with. No matter what

the slander is, so long as you can get up a charge, either for the imprisoning of a dangerous enemy or for terrifying the public mind. You yourself, Mr. Brand—I can see that your only notion of the innumerable secret societies now in Europe is that they will probably assassinate people. That's what they said about the Carbonari too. The objects of the Carbonari were plain as plain could be ; but no sooner had General Pepe kicked out Ferdinand and put in a constitutional monarch, than Austria must needs attribute every murder that was committed, to those detestable Carbonari, so that she should call upon Prussia and Russia to join her in strangling the infant liberties of Europe. You see, we can't get at those Royal slanderers. We can get at a man like Sir James Graham, when we force him to apologize in the House of Commons for having said that Mazzini instigated the assassination of the spies Emiliani and Lazzareschi."

"But, good heavens!" exclaimed Brand, "does anybody doubt that that was a political double murder?"

O'Halloran shrugged his shoulders, and smiled.

"You may call it murder if you like; others might call it a fitting punishment. But all I was asking you to do was to remove from your mind that bugbear that the autocratic governments of Europe have created for their own uses. No secret society—if you except those Nihilists, who appear to have gone mad altogether—I say, no secret society of the present day recognizes political assassination as a normal or desirable weapon; though it may have to be resorted to in extreme cases. You, as an individual, might, in certain circumstances, lawfully kill a man; but that is neither the custom, nor the object, nor the chief thought of your life."

"And are there many of these societies?" Brand asked.

O'Halloran had carelessly lit himself another pipe.

"Europe is honey-combed with them. They are growing in secret as rapidly as some kindred societies are growing in the open. Look at the German socialists—in 1871 they polled only 120,000 votes; in 1874 they polled 340,000: I imagine that Herr Furst von Bismarck will find some difficulty in suppressing that Frankenstein monster he coquetted so long with. Then the Knights of Labor in America: you will hear something of them by-and-by, or I am mistaken. In secret and in the open alike there is a vast power growing and growing, increasing in volume and bulk from hour to hour, from year to year; God only knows in what fashion it will reveal itself. But you may depend on it that when the spark does spring out of the cloud—when the clearance of the

atmosphere is due—people will look back on 1688, and 1798, and 1848 as mere playthings. The Great Revolution is still to come; it may be nearer than some imagine.”

He had grown more earnest, both in his manner and his speech.

“Well,” George Brand said, “timid people may reassure themselves. Where there are so many societies, there will be as many different aims. Some, like the wilder German socialists, will want a general participation of property; others a demolition of the churches and crucifixion of the priests; others the establishment of a Universal Republic. There may be a great deal of powder stored up, but it will all go off in different directions, in little fireworks.”

A quick light gleamed in those deep-set, lion-like eyes.

“Very well said!” was the scornful comment. “The Czar himself could not have expressed his belief, or at least his hope, more neatly. But let me tell you, sir, that the masses of mankind are not such hopeless idiots as are some of the feather-headed orators and writers who speak for them; and that you will appeal to them in vain if you do not appeal to their sense of justice, and their belief in right, and in the eternal laws of God. You may have a particular crowd go mad, or a particular city go mad; but the heart of the people beats true, and if you desire a great political change, you must appeal to their love of fair and honest dealing as between man and man. And even if the aims of these societies are diverse, what then? What would you think, now, if it were possible to construct a common platform, where certain aims at least could be accepted by all, and become bonds to unite those who are hoping for better things all over the earth? That did not occur to you as a possible thing, perhaps? You have only studied the ways of kings and governments—each one for itself. ‘Come over my boundary, and I will cleave your head; or, rather, I will send my common people to do it, for a little blood-letting from time to time is good for that vile and ignorant body.’ But the vile and ignorant body may begin to tire of that recurrent blood-letting, and might perhaps even say, ‘Brother across the boundary, I have no quarrel with you. You are poor and ignorant like myself; the travail of the earth lies hard on you; I would rather give you my hand. If I have any quarrel, surely it is with the tyrants of the earth, who have kept both you and me enslaved; who have taken away our children from us; who have left us scarcely bread. How long, O Lord, how long? We are tired of the reign of Cæsar; we

are beaten down with it; who will help us now to establish the reign of Christ?"

He rose. Despite the unkempt hair, this man looked quite handsome now, while this serious look was in his face. Brand began to perceive whence his friend Evelyn had derived at least some of his inspiration.

"Meanwhile," O'Halloran said, with a light, scornful laugh, "Christianity has been of excellent service to Cæsar; it has been the big policeman of Europe. Do you think these poor wretches would have been so patient if they had not believed there was some compensation reserved for them beyond the grave? They would have had Cæsar by the throat by this time."

"Then that scheme of co-operation you mentioned," Brand said, somewhat hastily—for he saw that O'Halloran was about to leave—"that is what Ferdinand Lind is working at?"

The other started.

"I cannot give you any information on that point," said O'Halloran, gravely. "And I do not think you are likely to get much anywhere if you are only moved by curiosity, however sympathetic and well-wishing."

He took up his hat and stick.

"Good-bye, Mr. Brand," said he; and he looked at him with a kindly look. "As far as I can judge, you are now in the position of a man at a partly opened door, half afraid to enter, and too curious to draw back. Well, my advice to you is—Draw back. Or at least remember this: that before you enter that room you must be without doubt—and *without fear.*"

CHAPTER VI.

BON VOYAGE!

FEAR he had none. His life was not so valuable to him that he would have hesitated about throwing himself into any forlorn-hope, provided that he was satisfied of the justice of the cause. He had dabbled a little in philosophy, and not only believed that the ordinary altruistic instincts of mankind could be traced to a purely utilitarian origin, but also that, on the same theory, the highest form of personal gratification might be found in the severest form, of self-sacrifice. He did not pity a martyr; he envied him. But be-

fore the martyr's joy must come the martyr's faith. Without that enthusiastic belief in the necessity and nobleness and value of the sacrifice, what could there be but physical pain and the despair of a useless death?

"But, if he had no fear, he had a superabundance of doubt. He had not all the pliable, receptive, imaginative nature of his friend, Lord Evelyn. He had more than the ordinary Englishman's distrust of secrecy. He was not to be won over by the visions of a St. Simon, the eloquence of a Fourier, the epigrams of a Proudhon: these were to him but intellectual playthings, of no practical value. It was, doubtless, a novelty for a young man brought up as Lord Evelyn had been to associate with a gin-drinking Irish reporter, and to regard him as the mysterious apostle of a new creed; Brand only saw in O'Halloran a light-headed, imaginative, talkative person, as safe to trust to for guidance as a will-o'-the-wisp. It is true that for the time being he had been thrilled by the passionate fervor of Natalie Lind's singing; and many a time since he could have fancied that he heard in the stillness of the night that pathetic and vibrating appeal—

"When, when will the Lord cry, 'Revenge, it is mine?'"

But he dissociated her from her father's schemes altogether. No doubt she was moved by the generous enthusiasm of a young girl. She had a warm, human, sympathetic heart; the cry of the poor and the suffering appealed to her; and she was confident in the success of projects of which she had been prudently kept ignorant. This was George Brand's reading. He would not have Natalie Lind associated with Liecester Square and a lot of garlic-eating revolutionaries.

"But who is this man Lind?" he asked, impatiently, of Lord Evelyn. He had driven up to his friend's house in Clarges Street, had had luncheon with him, and they were now smoking a cigarette in the library.

"You mean his nationality?" said his friend, laughing. "That has puzzled me, too. He seems, at all events, to have had his finger in a good many pies. He escaped into Turkey with Bem, I know; and he has been imprisoned in Russia; and once or twice I have heard him refer to the amnesty that was proclaimed when Louis Napoleon was presented with an heir. But whether he is Pole, or Jew, or Slav, there is no doubt about his daughter being a thorough Hungarian."

"Not the least," said Brand, with decision. "I have seen lots of women of that type in Pesth, and in Vienna, too: if

you are walking in the Prater you can always tell the Hungarian women as they drive past. But you ~~never~~ see one as beautiful as she is."

After awhile Lord Evelyn said,

"This is Natalie's birthday. By-and-by I am going along to Bond Street to buy some little thing for her."

"Then she allows you to make her presents?" Brand said, somewhat coldly.

"She and I are like brother and sister now," said the pale, deformed lad, without hesitation. "If I were ill, I think she would be glad to come and look after me."

"You have already plenty of sisters who would do that."

"By-the-way, they are coming to town next week with my mother. You must come and dine with us some night, if you are not afraid to face the chatter of such a lot of girls."

"Have they seen Miss Lind?"

"No, not yet."

"And how will you explain your latest craze to them, Evelyn? They are very nice girls indeed, you know; but—but—when they set full cry on you—I suppose some day I shall have to send them a copy of a newspaper from abroad, with this kind of thing in it: '*Compeared yesterday before the Correctional Tribunal, Earnest Francis D'Agincourt, Baron Evelyn, charged with having in his possession two canisters of an explosive compound and fourteen empty missiles. Further, among the correspondence of the accused was found—*'"

"'*A letter from an Englishman named Brand,*'" continued Lord Evelyn, as he rose and went to the window, "'*apparently written under the influence of nightmare.*' Come, Brand, I see the carriage is below. Will you drive with me to the jeweller's?"

"Certainly," said his friend; and at this moment the carriage was announced. "I suppose it wouldn't do for me to buy the thing? You know I have more money to spend on trinkets than you have."

They were very intimate friends indeed. Lord Evelyn only said, with a smile,

"I am afraid Natalie wouldn't like it."

But this choosing of a birthday present was a terrible business. The jeweller was as other jewellers; his designs were mostly limited to the representation of two objects—a butterfly for a woman, and a horseshoe for a man. At last Brand, who had been walking about from time to time, espied, in a distant case, an object which instantly attracted his attention. It was a flat piece of wood or board, covered with blue velvet;

and on this had been twined an unknown number of yards of the beautiful thread-like gold chain common to the jewellers' shop-windows in Venice.

"Here you are, Evelyn," Brand said at once. "Why not buy a lot of this thin chain, and let her make it into any sort of decoration that she chooses?"

"It is an ignominious way out of the difficulty," said the other: but he consented; and yard after yard of the thread-like chain was unrolled. When allowed to drop together, it seemed to go into no compass at all.

They went outside.

"What are you going to do now, Brand?"

The other was looking cheerless enough.

"I?" he said, with the slightest possible shrug. "I suppose I must go down to the club, and yawn away the time till dinner."

"Then why not come with me? I have a commission or two from my sisters—one as far out as Notting Hill; but after that we can drive back through the Park and call on the Linds. I dare say Lind will be home by that time."

Lord Evelyn's friend was more than delighted. As they drove from place to place he was a good deal more talkative than was his wont; and, among other things, confessed his belief that Ferdinand Lind seemed much too hard-headed a man to be engaged in mere visionary enterprises. But somehow the conversation generally came round to Mr. Lind's daughter; and Brand seemed very anxious to find out to what degree she was cognizant of her father's schemes. On this point Lord Evelyn knew nothing.

At last they arrived at the house in Curzon Street, and found Mr. Lind just on the point of entering. He stayed to receive them; went up-stairs with them to the drawing-room, and then begged them to excuse him for a few minutes. Presently Natalie Lind appeared.

How this man envied his friend Evelyn the frank, sister-like way in which she took the little present, and thanked him, for that and his kind wishes!

"Ah, do you know," she said, "what a strange birthday gift I had given me this morning? See!"

She brought over the old-fashioned silver locket, and told them the whole story.

"Is it not strange?" she said. "'*From Natalie to Natalie*': that is, from myself to myself. What can it mean?"

"Have you not asked your father, then, about his mysterious messenger?" Brand said. He was always glad to ask

this girl a question, for she looked him so straight in the face with her soft, dark eyes, as she answered,

"He has only now come home. I will directly."

"But why does your father call you Natalushka, Natalie?" asked Lord Evelyn.

There was the slightest blush on the pale, clear face.

"It was a nickname they gave me, I am told, when I was child. They used to make me angry."

"And now, if one were to call you Natalushka?"

"My anger would be too terrible," she said, with a smile. "Papa alone dares to do that."

Presently her father came into the room.

"Oh, papa," said she, "I have discovered who the lady is whom you got to bring me the flowers. And see! she has given me this strange little locket. Look at the inscription—'*From Natalie to Natalushka.*'"

Lind only glanced at the locket. His eyes were fixed on the girl.

"Where did you see the—the lady?" he asked, coldly.

"In the Park. But she did not stay a moment, or speak; she hurried on, and Anneli thought she was crying. I almost think so too. Who was it, papa? May I speak to her, if I see her again?"

Mr. Lind turned aside for a moment. Brand, who was narrowly watching him, was convinced that the man was in a passion of rage. But when he turned again he was outwardly calm.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Natalie," he said in measured tones. "I have warned you before against making indiscriminate acquaintances; and Anneli, if she is constantly getting such stupidities into her head, must be sent about her business. I do not wish to hear anything more about it. Will you ring and ask why tea has not been sent up?"

The girl silently obeyed. Her father had never spoken to her in this cold, austere tone before. She sat down at a small table, apart.

Mr. Lind talked for a minute or two with his guests; then he said,

"Natalie, you have the zither there; why do you not play us something?"

She turned to the small instrument, and, after a second or two, played a few notes: that was all. She rose and said, "I don't think I can play this afternoon, papa;" and then she left the room.

Mr. Lind pretended to converse with his guests as before:

and tea came in ; but presently he begged to be excused for a moment, and left the room. George Brand rose, and took a turn or two up and down.

"It would take very little," he muttered—for his teeth were set—"to make me throw that fellow out of the window !"

"What do you mean ?" Lord Evelyn said, in great surprise.

"Didn't you see? She left the room to keep from crying. That miserable Polish cutthroat—I should like to kick him down-stairs !"

But at this moment the door opened, and father and daughter entered, arm-in-arm. Natalie's face was a little bit flushed, but she was very gentle and affectionate ; they had made up that brief misunderstanding, obviously. And she had brought in her hand a mob-cap of black satin : would Lord Evelyn allow her to try the effect of twisting those beautiful golden threads through it ?

"Natalushka," said her father, with great good-humor, "it is your birthday. Do you think you could persuade Lord Evelyn and Mr. Brand to come to your dinner-party ?"

It was then explained to the two gentlemen that on this great anniversary it was the custom of Mr. Lind, when in London, to take his daughter to dine at some French or Italian restaurant in Regent Street or thereabouts. In fact, she liked to play at being abroad for an hour or two ; to see around her foreign faces, and hear foreign tongues.

"I am afraid you will say that it is very easy to remind yourself of the Continent," said Mr. Lind, smiling—"that you have only to go to a place where they give you oily food and bad wine."

"On the contrary," said Brand, "I should think it very difficult in London to imagine yourself in a foreign town ; for London is drained. However, I accept the invitation with pleasure."

"And I," said Lord Evelyn. "Now, must we be off to dress ?"

"Not at all," said Natalie. "Do you not understand that you are abroad, and walking into a restaurant to dine ? And now I will play you a little invitation—not to dinner ; for you must suppose you have dined—and you come out on the stairs of the hotel, and step into the black gondola."

She went along to the small table, and sat down to the zither. There were a few notes of prelude ; and then they heard the beautiful low voice added to the soft tinkling sounds. What did they vaguely make out from that melodious murmur of Italian ?

Behold the beautiful night—the wind sleeps drowsily—the silent shores slumber in the dark :

“Sul placido elemento
Vien meco a navigar !”

The soft wind moves—as it stirs among the leaves—it moves and dies—among the murmur of the water :

“Lascia l'amico tetto
Vien meco a navigar !”

Now on the spacious mantle—of the already darkening heavens—see, oh, the shining wonder—how the white stars tremble :

“Ai raggi della luna
Vien meco a navigar !”

Where were they? Surely they have passed out from the darkness of the narrow canal, and are away on the broad bosom of the lagoon. The Place of St. Mark is all aglow with its golden points of fire; the yellow radiance spreads out into the night. And that other wandering mass of gold—the gondola hung round with lamps, and followed by a dark procession through the silence of the waters—does not the music come from thence? Listen, now :

“Sul l'onde addormentate
Vien meco a navigar !”

Can they hear the distant chorus, in there at the shore where the people are walking about in the golden glare of the lamps?

“Vien meco a navigar !
Vien meco a navigar !”

Or can some faint echo be carried away out to yonder island, where the pale blue-white radiance of the moonlight is beginning to touch the tall dome of San Giorgio?

“—a navigar !
—a navigar !”

“It seems to me,” said Lord Evelyn, when the girl rose, with a smile on her face, “that you do not need to go into Regent Street when you want to imagine yourself abroad.”

Natalie looked at her watch.

“If you will excuse me, I will go and get ready now.”

Well, they went to the big foreign restaurant; and had a small table all to themselves, in the midst of the glare, and

the heat, and the indiscriminate Bable of tongues. And, under the guidance of Mr. Brand, they adventured upon numerous articles of food which were more varied in their names than in their flavor; and they tasted some of the compounds, reeking of iris-root, that the Neapolitans call wine, until they fell back on a flask of Chianti, and were content; and they regarded their neighbors, and were regarded in turn. In the midst of it all, Mr. Lind, who had been somewhat pre-occupied, said suddenly.

"Natalie, can you start with me for Leipsic to-morrow afternoon?"

She was as prompt as a soldier.

"Yes, papa. Shall I take Anneli or not?"

"You may if you like."

After that George Brand seemed to take very little interest in this heterogeneous banquet; he stared absently at the foreign-looking people, at the hurrying waiters, at the stout lady behind the bar. Even when Mr. Lind told his daughter that her black satin mob-cap, with its wonderful intertwistings of Venetian chain, looked very striking in a mirror opposite, and when Lord Evelyn eagerly gave his friend the credit of having selected that birthday gift, he did not seem to pay much heed. When, after all was over, and he had wished Natalie "*Bon voyage*" at the door of the brougham, Lord Evelyn said to him,

"Come along to Clarges Street now and smoke a cigar."

"No, thanks!" he said. "I think I will stroll down to my rooms now."

"What is the matter with you, Brand? You have been looking very glum."

"Well, I have been thinking that London is a depressing sort of a place for a man to live in who does not know many people. It is very big, and very empty. I don't think I shall be able to stand it much longer."

CHAPTER VII.

IN SOLITUDE.

A BLUSTERING, cold morning in March; the skies lowering, the wind increasing, and heavy showers being driven up from time to time from the black and threatening south-west. This was strange weather to make a man think of going to

the seaside ; and of all places at the seaside to Dover, and of all places in Dover to the Lord Warden Hotel, which was sure to be filled with fear-stricken foreigners, waiting for the sea to calm. Waters, as he packed the small portmanteau, could not at all understand this freak on the part of his master.

"If Lord Evelyn calls, sir," he said at the station, "when shall I say you will be back?"

"In a few days, perhaps. I don't know."

He had a compartment to himself; and away the train went through the wet and dismal and foggy country, with the rain pouring down the panes of the carriage. The dismal prospect outside, however, did not matter much to this solitary traveller. He turned his back to the window, and read all the way down.

At Dover the outlook was still more dismal. A dirty, yellow-brown sea was rolling heavily in, springing white along the Admiralty Pier; gusts of rain were sweeping along the thoroughfare between the station and the hotel; in the hotel itself the rooms were occupied by a miscellaneous collection of dissatisfied folk, who aimlessly read the advertisements in Bradshaw, or stared through the dripping windows at the yellow waves outside. This was the condition of affairs when George Brand took up his residence there. He was quite alone; but he had a sufficiency of books with him; and so deeply engaged was he with these, that he let the ordinary coffee-room discussions about the weather pass absolutely unheeded.

On the second morning a number of the travellers plucked up heart of grace and embarked, though the weather was still squally. George Brand was not in the least interested as to the speculations of those who remained about the responsibilities of the passage. He drew his chair toward the fire, and relapsed into his reading.

This day, however, was varied by his making the acquaintance of a little old French lady, which he did by means of her two granddaughters, Josephine, and Veronique. Veronique, having been pushed by Josephine, stumbled against Mr. Brand's knee, and would inevitably have fallen into the fireplace had he not caught her. Thereupon the little old lady, hurrying across the room, and looking very much inclined to box the ears of both Josephine and Veronique, most profusely apologized, in French, to monsieur. Monsieur replying in that tongue, said it was of no consequence whatever. Then madame, greatly delighted at finding some one, not a

waiter, to whom she could speak in her own language, continued the conversation, and very speedily made monsieur the confident of all her hopes and fears about that terrible business the Channel passage. No doubt monsieur was also waiting for this dreadful storm to abate?

Monsieur quickly perceived that so long as this voluble little old lady—who was as yellow as a frog, and had beady black eyes, but whose manner was exceedingly charming—chose to attach herself to him, his pursuit of knowledge was not likely to be attended with much success, so he shut the book on his finger, and pleasantly said to her,

“Oh no, madame; I am only waiting here for some friends.”

Madame was greatly alarmed: surely they would not cross in such frightful weather? Monsieur ventured to think it was not so very bad. Then the little French lady glanced out at the window, and threw up her hands, and said with a shudder.

“Frightful! Truly frightful. What should I do with those two little ones ill, and myself ill? The sea might sweep them away!”

Mr. Brand, having observed something of the manners of Josephine and Veronique, was inwardly of opinion that the sea might be worse employed; but what he said was—

“You could take a deck-cabin, madame.”

Madame again shuddered.

“Your friends are English, no doubt, monsieur; the English are not so much afraid of storms.”

“No, madame, they are not English; but I do not think they would let such a day as this, for example, hinder them. They are not likely, however, to be on their way back for a day or two. To-morrow I may run over to Calais, just on the chance of crossing with them again.”

Here was a mad Englishman, to be sure! When people, driven by dire necessity, had their heart in their mouth at the very notion of encountering that rough sea, here was a person who thought of crossing and returning for no reason on earth—a trifling compliment to his friends—a pleasure excursion—a break in the monotony of the day!

“And I shall be pleased to look after the little ones, madame,” said he, politely, “if you are going over.”

“Madame thanked him very profusely; but assured him that so long as the weather looked so stormy she could not think of intrusting Josephine and Veronique to the mercy of the waves.

Now, if George Brand had little hope of meeting his friends that day, he acted pretty much as if he were expecting some one. First of all, he had secured a saloon-carriage in the afternoon mail-train to London—an unnecessary luxury for a bachelor well accustomed to the hardships of travel. Then he had managed to procure a handsome bouquet of freshly-cut flowers. Finally, there was some mysterious arrangement by which fruit, cakes, tea, and wine were to be ready at a moment's notice in the event of that saloon-carriage being required.

Then, as soon as the rumor went through the hotel that the vessel was in sight, away he went down the pier, with his coat-collar tightly buttoned, and his hat jammed down. What a toy-looking thing the steamer was, away out there in the mists or the rain, with the brown line of smoke stretching back to the horizon! She was tossing and rolling a good deal among the brown waves: he almost hoped his friends were not on board. And he wished that all the more when he at length saw the people clamber up the gangway—a miserable procession of half-drowned folk, some of them scarcely able to walk. No; his friends were not there. He returned to the hotel, and to his books.

But the attentions of Josephine and Veronique had become too pressing; so he retired from the reading-room, and took refuge in his own room up-stairs. It fronted the sea. He could hear the long, monotonous, continuous wash of the waves: from time to time the windows rattled with the wind.

He took from his portmanteau another volume from that he had been reading, and sat down by the window. But he had only read a line or two when he turned and looked absently out on the sea. Was he trying to recall, amidst all that confused and murmuring noise, some other sound that seemed to haunt him?

“Who is your lady of love, oh ye that pass
Singing?”

Was he trying to recall that pathetic thrill in his friend Evelyn's voice which he knew was but the echo of another voice? He had never heard Natalie Lind read; but he knew that that was how she had read, when Evelyn's sensitive nature had heard and been permeated by the strange tremor. And now, as he opened the book again, whose voice was it he seemed to hear, in the silence of the small room, amidst the low and constant murmur of the waves?

"—And ye shall die before your thrones be won.
 —Yea, and the changed world and the liberal sun
 Shall move and shine with out us, and we lie
 Dead; but if she too move on earth and live—
 But if the old world, with all the old irons rent,
 Laugh and give thanks, shall we be not content?
 Nay, we shall rather live, we shall not die,
 Life being so little, and death so good to give.

* * * * *

"—But ye that might be clothed with all things pleasant,
 Ye are foolish that put off the fair soft present,
 That clothe yourselves with the cold future air;
 When mother and father, and tender sister and brother,
 And the old live love that was shall be as ye,
 Dust, and no fruit of loving life shall be.
 —She shall be yet who is more than all these were,
 Than sister or wife or father unto us or mother."

He turned again to the window, to the driven yellow sea,
and the gusts of rain. Surely there was no voice to be heard
from other and farther shores?

"—Is this worth life, is this to win for wages?
 Lo, the dead mouths of the awful gray-grown ages,
 The venerable, in the past that is their prison,
 In the outer darkness, in the unopening grave,
 Laugh, knowing how many as ye now say have said—
 How many, and all are fallen, are fallen and dead:
 Shall ye dead rise, and these dead have not risen?
 —Not we but she, who is tender and swift to save.

"—Are ye not weary, and faint not by the way,
 Seeing night by night devoured of day by day,
 Seeing hour by hour consumed in sleepless fire?
 Sleepless: and ye too, when shall ye too sleep?
 —We are weary in heart and head, in hands and feet,
 And surely more than all things sleep were sweet,
 Than all things save the inexorable desire
 Which whoso knoweth shall neither faint nor weep."

He rose, and walked up and down for a time. What would
one not give for a faith like that?

"—Is this so sweet that one were fain to follow?
 Is this so sure where all men's hopes are hollow,
 Even this your dream, that by much tribulation
 Ye shall make whole flawed hearts, and bowed necks straight?
 —Nay, though our life were blind, our death were fruitless,
 Not therefore were the whole world's high hope rootless;
 But man to man, nation would turn to nation,
 And the old life live, and the old great world be great."

With such a faith—with that "inexorable desire" burning

in the heart and the brain—surely one could find the answer easy enough to the last question of the poor creatures who wonder at the way-worn pilgrims,

“—Pass on then, and pass by us and let us be,
For what light think ye after life to see?
And if the world fare better will ye know.
And if man triumph who shall seek you and say?”

That he could answer for himself, at any rate. He was not one to put much store by the fair soft present; and if he were to enter upon any undertaking such as that he had had but a glimpse of, neither personal reward nor hope of any immediate success would be the lure. He would be satisfied to know that his labor or his life had been well spent. But whence was to come that belief? whence the torch to kindle the sacred fire?

The more he read, during these days of waiting, of the books and pamphlets he had brought with him, the less clear seemed the way before him. He was struck with admiration when he read of those who had forfeited life or liberty in this or the other cause; and too often with despair when he came to analyze their aims. Once or twice, indeed, he was so moved by the passionate eloquence of some socialist writer that he was ready to say, “Well, the poor devils have toiled long enough; give them their turn, let the revolution cost what it may!” And then immediately afterward: “What! Stir up the unhappy wretches to throw themselves on the bayonets of the standing armies of Europe? There is no emancipation for them that way.”

But when he turned from the declamation and the impracticable designs of this impassioned literature to the vast scheme of co-operation that had been suggested rather than described to him, there seemed more hope. If all these various forces that were at work could be directed into one channel, what might they not accomplish? Weed out the visionary, the impracticable, the anarchical from their aims; and then what might not be done by this convergence of all these eager social movements? Lind, he argued with himself, was not at all a man likely to devote himself to optimistic dreams. Further than that—and here he was answering a suspicion that again and again recurred to him—what if, in such a great social movement, men were to be found who were only playing for their own hand? That was the case in every such combination. But false or self-seeking agents neither destroyed the nobleness of the work nor could defeat it in the

end if it were worthy to live. They might try to make for themselves what use they could of the current, but they too were swept onward to the sea.

So he argued, and communed, and doubted, and tried to believe. And all through it—whether he paced up and down by the sea in the blustering weather, or strolled away through the town and up the face of the tall white cliff, or lay awake in the dark night, listening to the rush and moan of the waves—all through these doubts and questions there was another and sweeter and clearer sound, that seemed to come from afar—

“She shall be yet who is more than all these were,
Than sister or wife or father unto us or mother.”

However loud the sea was at night, that was the sound he heard, clear and sweet—the sound of a girl’s voice, that had joy in it, and faith in the future, and that spoke to him of what was to be.

Well, the days passed ; and still his friends did not come. He had many trips across, to while away the time ; and had become great friends with the stout, black-haired French captain. He had conveyed Josephine and Veronique and their little grandmother safely over, and had made them as comfortable as was possible under trying circumstances. And always and every day there were freshly-cut flowers and renewed fruit, and a re-engaged saloon-carriage waiting for those strangers who did not come ; until both hotel people and railway people began to think Mr. Brand as mad as the little French lady assured herself he was, when he said he meant to cross the Channel twice for nothing.

At last—at last ! He had strolled up to the Calais station, and was standing on the platform when the train came in. But there was no need for him to glance eagerly up and down at the now opening doors ; for who was this calmly regarding him—or rather regarding him with a smile of surprise ? Despite the big furred cloak and the hood, he knew at once ; he darted forward, lifted the lower latch and opened the door, and gave her his hand.

“Oh, how do you do, Mr. Brand ?” said she, with a pleasant look of welcome. “Who could have expected to meet you here ?”

He was confused, embarrassed, bewildered. This voice so strangely recalled those sounds that had been haunting him for days. He could only stammer out,

“I—I happened to be at Dover, and thought I would run

over here for a little bit. How lucky you are—it is such a beautiful day for crossing.”

“That is good news ; I must tell papa,” said Natalie, cheerfully, as she turned again to the open door.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DISCOVERY.

“AND you are going over too? And to London also? Oh, that will be very nice.”

It seemed so strange to hear this voice, that had for days sounded to him as if it were far away, now quite close, and talking in this friendly and familiar fashion. Then she had brought the first of the spring with her. The air had grown quite mild ; the day was clear and shining ; even the little harbor there seemed bright and picturesque in the sun. He had never before considered Calais a very beautiful place.

And as for her ; well, she appeared pleased to have met with this unexpected companion ; and she was very cheerful and talkative as they went down to the quay, these two together. And whether it was that she was glad to be relieved from the cramped position of the carriage, or whether it was that his being taller than she gave countenance to her height, or whether it was merely that she rejoiced in the sweet air and the exhilaration of the sunlight, she seemed to walk with even more than her usual proudness of gait. This circumstance did not escape the eye of her father, who was immediately behind.

“Natalie,” said he, peevishly, “you are walking as if you wore a sword by your side.”

She did not seem sorely hurt.

“‘Du Schwert an meiner Linken!’” she said, with a laugh. “It is my military cloak that makes you think so, papa.”

Why, even this cockle-shell of a steamer looked quite inviting on so pleasant a morning. And there before them stretched the blue expanse of the sea, with every wave, and every ripple on every wave, flashing a line of silver in the sunlight. No sooner were they out of the yellow-green waters of the harbor than Mr. Brand had his companions conducted on to the bridge between the paddle-boxes ; and the little crop-haired French boy brought them camp-stools, and their faces were turned toward England.

"Ah!" said Natalie, "many a poor wretch has breathed more freely when at last he found himself looking out for the English shore. Do you remember old Anton Pepczinski and his solemn toast, papa?"

She turned to George Brand.

"He was an old Polish gentleman, who used to come to our house in the evening, he and a few others of his countrymen, to smoke and play chess. But always, some time during the evening, he would say, 'Gentlemen, a Pole is never ungrateful. I call on you to drink this toast: *To the white chalk-line beyond the sea!*'" And then she added, quickly, "If I were English, how proud I should be of England!"

"But why?" he said.

"Because she has kept liberty alive in Europe," said the girl, proudly; "because she offers an exile to the oppressed, no matter from whence they come; because she says to the tyrant, 'No, you cannot follow.' Why, when even your beer-men your dray-men know how to treat a Haynau, what must the spirit of the country be? If only those fine fellows could have caught Windischgratz too!"

Her father laughed at her vehemence; Brand did not. That strange vibration in the girl's voice penetrated him to the heart.

"But then," said he, after a second or two, "I have been amusing myself for some days back by reading a good deal of political writing, mostly by foreigners; and if I were to believe what they say, I should take it that England was the most superstitious, corrupt, enslaved nation on the face of the earth! What with its reverence for rank, its worship of the priesthood—oh, I cannot tell you what a frightful country it is!"

"Who were the writers?" Mr. Lind asked.

Brand named two or three, and instantly the attention of the others seemed arrested.

"Oh, that is the sort of literature you have been reading?" he said, with a quick glance.

"I have had some days' idleness."

"Excuse me," said the other, with a smile; "but I think you might have spent it better. That kind of literature only leads to disorder and anarchy. It may have been useful at one time; it is useful no longer. Enough of ploughing has been done; we want sowing done now—we want writers who will build up instead of pulling down. Those Nihilists," he added, almost with a sigh, "are becoming more and more impracticable. They aim at scarcely anything beyond destruction."

Here Natalie changed the conversation. This was too bright and beautiful a day to admit of despondency.

"I suppose you love the sea, Mr. Brand?" she said. "All Englishmen do. And yachting—I suppose you go yachting?"

"I have tried it; but it is too tedious for me," said Brand. "The sort of yachting I like is in a vessel of five thousand tons, going three hundred and eighty miles a day. With half a gale of wind in your teeth in the 'rolling Forties,' then there is some fun."

"I must go over to the States very soon," Mr. Lind said.

"Papa!"

"The worst of it is," her father said, without heeding that exclamation of protest, "that I have so much to do that can only be done by word of mouth."

"I wish I could take the message for you," Brand said, lightly. "When the weather looks decent, I very often take a run across to New York, put up for a few days at the Brevoort House, and take the next ship home. It is very enjoyable, especially if you know the officers. Then the bagman—I have acquired a positive love for the bagman."

"The what?" said Natalie.

"The bagman. The 'commy' his friends call him. The commercial traveller, don't you know? He is a most capital fellow—full of life and fun, desperately facetious, delighting in practical jokes: altogether a wonderful creature. You begin to think you are in another generation—before England became melancholy—the generation, for example, that roared over the adventures of Tom and Jerry."

Natalie did not know who Tom and Jerry were; but that was of little consequence; for at this moment they began to describe "the white chalk-line beyond the sea"—the white line of the English coast. And they went on chatting cheerfully; and the sunlight flashed its diamonds on the blue waters around them, and the white chalk cliffs became more distinct.

"And yet it seems so heartless for one to be going back to idleness," Natalie Lind said, absently. "Papa works as hard in England as anywhere else; but what can I do? To think of one going back to peaceful days, and comfort, and pleasant friends, when others have to go through such misery, and to fight against such persecution! When Vjera Sassulitch offered me her hand—"

She stopped abruptly, with a quick, frightened look, first at George Brand, then at her father.

"You need not hesitate, Natalie," her father said, calmly.

"Mr. Brand has given me his word of honor he will reveal nothing he may hear from us."

"I do not think you need be afraid," said Brand; but all the same he was conscious of a keen pang of mortification. He, too, had noticed that quick look of fright and distrust. What did it mean, then? "*You are beside us, you are near to us; but you are not of us, you are not with us.*"

He was silent, and she was silent too. She seemed ashamed of her indiscretion, and would say nothing further about Vjera Sassulitch.

"Don't imagine, Mr. Brand," said her father, to break this awkward silence, "that what Natalie says is true. She is not going to be so idle as all that. No; she has plenty of hard work before her—at least, I think it hard work—translating from the German into Polish."

"I wish I could help," Brand said, in a low voice. "I do not know a word of Polish."

"You help?" she said, regarding him with the beautiful dark eyes, that had a sudden wonder in them. "Would you, if you knew Polish?"

He met that straight, fearless glance without flinching; and he said "Yes," while they still looked at each other. Then her eyes fell; and perhaps there was the slightest flush of embarrassment, or pleasure, on the pale, handsome face.

But how quickly her spirits rose! There was no more talk of politics as they neared England. He described the successive ships to her; he called her attention to the strings of wild-duck flying up Channel; he named the various headlands to her. Then, as they got nearer and nearer, the little Anneli had to be sought out, and the various travelling impedimenta got together. It did not occur to Mr. Lind or his daughter as strange that George Brand should be travelling without any luggage whatever.

But surely it must have occurred to them as remarkable that a bachelor should have had a saloon-carriage reserved for himself—unless, indeed, they reflected that a rich Englishman was capable of any whimsical extravagance. Then, no sooner had Miss Lind entered this carriage, than it seemed as though everything she could think of was being brought for her. Such flowers did not grow in railway-stations—especially in the month of March. Had the fruit dropped from the telegraph-poles? Cakes, wine, tea, magazines and newspapers appeared to come without being asked for.

"Mr. Brand," said Natalie, "you must be an English

Monte Cristo: do you clap your hands, and the things appear?"

But a Monte Cristo should never explain. The conjuror who reveals his mechanism is no longer a conjuror. George Brand only laughed, and said he hoped Miss Lind would always find people ready to welcome her when she reached English shores.

As they rattled along through those shining valleys—the woods and fields and homesteads all glowing in the afternoon sun—she had put aside her travelling-cloak and hood, for the air was quite mild. Was it the drawing off of the hood, or the stir of wind on board the steamer, that had somewhat disarranged her hair?—at all events, here and there about her small ear or the shapely neck there was an escaped curl of raven-black. She had taken off her gloves, too: her hands, somewhat large, were of a beautiful shape, and transparently white. The magazines and newspapers received not much attention—except from Mr. Lind, who said that at last he should see some news neither a week old nor fictitious. As for these other two, they seemed to find a wonderful lot to talk about, and all of a profoundly interesting character. With a sudden shock of disappointment George Brand found that they were almost into London.

His hand-bag was at once passed by the custom-house people; and he had nothing to do but say good-bye. His face was not over-cheerful.

"Well, it was a lucky meeting," Mr. Lind said. "Natalie ought to thank you for being so kind to her."

"Yes; but not here," said the girl, and she turned to him. "Mr. Brand, people who have travelled so far together should not part so quickly: it is miserable. Will you not come and spend the evening with us?"

"Natalie will give us something in the way of an early dinner," said Mr. Lind, "and then you can make her play the zither for you."

Well, there was not much hesitation about his accepting. That drawing-room, with its rose-and-green-shaded candles, was not as other drawing-rooms in the evening. In that room you could hear the fountains plashing in the Villa Reale, and the Capri fishermen singing afar, and the cattle-bells chiming on the Campagna, and the gondolas sending their soft chorus across the lagoon. When Brand left his bag in the cloak-room at the station he gave the porter half a crown for carrying it thither, which was unnecessary. Nor was there any hopeless apathy on his face as he drove away with these

two friends through the darkening afternoon, in the little hired brougham. When they arrived in Curzon Street, he was even good enough to assist the timid little Anneli to descend from the box; but this was in order that he might slip a tip into the hand of the coachman. The coachman scarcely said "Thank you." It was not until afterward that he discovered he had put half a sovereign into his breeches-pocket as if it were an ordinary sixpence.

Natalie Lind came down to dinner in a dress of black velvet, with a mob-cap of rose-red silk. Round her neck she wore a band of Venetian silver-work, from the centre of which was suspended the little old-fashioned locket she had received in Hyde Park. George Brand remembered the story, and perhaps was a trifle surprised that she should wear so conspicuously the gift of a stranger.

She was very friendly, and very cheerful. She did not seem at all fatigued with her travelling; on the contrary, it was probably the sea-air and the sunlight that had lent to her cheek a faint flush of color. But at the end of dinner her father said.

"Natalushka, if we go into the drawing-room, and listen to music, after so long a day, we shall all go to sleep. You must come into the smoking-room with us."

"Very well, papa."

"But, Miss Lind," the other gentleman remonstrated, "a velvet dress—tobacco-smoke—"

"My dresses must take their chance," said Miss Lind. "I wear them to please my friends, not to please chance acquaintances who may call during the day."

And so they retired to the little den at the end of the passage; and Natalie handed Mr. Brand a box of cigars to choose from, and got down from the rack her father's long-stemmed, red-bowled pipe. Then she took a seat in the corner by the fire, and listened.

The talk was all about that anarchical literature that Brand had been devouring down at Dover; and he was surprised to find how little sympathy Lind had with writing of that kind, though he had to confess that certain of the writers were personal friends of his own. Natalie sat silent, listening intently, and staring into the fire.

At last Brand said,

"Of course, I had other books. For example, one I see on your shelves there." He rose, and took down the "Songs before Sunrise." "Miss Lind," he said, "I am afraid you will laugh at me; but I have been haunted with the notion

that you have been teaching Lord Evelyn how to read poetry, or that he has been unconsciously imitating you. I heard him repeat some passages from 'The Pilgrims,' and I was convinced he was reproducing something he had heard from you. Well—I am almost ashamed to ask you—"

A touch of embarrassment appeared on the girl's face, and she glanced at her father.

"Yes, certainly, Natalie; why not?"

"Well," she said, lightly, "I cannot read if I am stared at. You must remain as you are."

She took the book from him, and passed to the other side of the room, so that she was behind them both. There was silence for an instant or two as she turned over the leaves.

Then the silence was broken; and if Brand was instantly assured that his surmise was correct, he also knew that here was a more pathetic cadence—a prouder ring—than any that Lord Evelyn had thrown into the lines. She read at random—a passage here, a passage there—but always it seemed to him that the voice was the voice of a herald proclaiming the new awakening of the world—the evil terrors of the night departing—the sunlight of liberty and right and justice beginning to shine over the sea. And these appeals to England!

"Oh thou, clothed round with raiment of white waves,
Thy brave brows lightening through the gray wet air,
Thou, lulled with sea-sounds of a thousand caves,
And lit with sea-shine to thy inland lair,
Whose freedom clothed the naked souls of slaves
And stripped the muffled souls of tyrants bare,
Oh, by the centuries of thy glorious graves,
By the live light of the earth that was thy care,
Live, thou must not be dead,
Live; let thy armed head
Lift itself up to sunward and the fair
Daylight of time and man,
Thine head republican,
With the same splendor on thine helmless hair
That in his eyes kept up a light
Who on thy glory gazed away their sacred sight."

The cry there was in this voice! Surely his heart answered,

"Oh Milton's land, what ails thee to be dead!"

Was it in this very room, he wondered, that the old Polish refugee was used to lift up his trembling hand and bid his compatriots drink to "the white chalk-line beyond the sea?"

How could he forget, as he and she sat together that morning, and gazed across the blue waters to the far and sunlit line of coast, the light that shone on her face as she said, "If I were English, how proud I should be of England!" And this England of her veneration and her love—did it not contain some, at least, who would answer to her appeal?

Presently Natalie Lind shut the book and gently laid it down, and stole out of the room. She was gone only for a few seconds. When she returned, she had in her hand a volume of sketches, of which she had been speaking during dinner.

He did not open this volume at once. On the contrary, he was silent for a little while; and then he looked up, and addressed Natalie, with a strange grave smile on his face.

"I was about to tell your father, Miss Lind, when you came in, that if I could not translate for you, or carry a message across the Atlantic for him, he might at least find something else that I can do. At all events, may I say that I am willing to join you, if I can be of any help at all?"

Ferdinand Lind regarded him for a second, and said, quite calmly,

"It is unnecessary. You have already joined us."

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT IN VENICE.

THE solitary occupant of this railway-carriage was apparently reading; but all the same he looked oftener at his watch than at his book. At length he definitely shut the volume and placed it in his travelling-bag. Then he let down the carriage-window, and looked out into the night.

The heavens were clear and calm; the newly-risen moon was but a thin crescent of silver; in the south a large planet was shining. All around him, as it seemed, stretched a vast plain of water, as dark and silent and serene as the overarching sky. Then, far ahead, he could catch a glimpse of a pale line stretching across the watery plain—a curve of the many-arched viaduct along which the train was thundering; and beyond that again, and low down at the horizon, two or three minute and dusky points of orange. These lights were the lights of Venice.

This traveller was not much hampered with luggage.

When finally the train was driven into the glare of the station, and the usual roar and confusion began, he took his small bag in his hand and rapidly made his way through the crowd; then out and down the broad stone steps, and into a gondola. In a couple of minutes he was completely away from all that glare and bustle and noise; nothing around him but darkness and an absolute silence.

The city seemed as the City of the Dead. The tall and sombre buildings on each side of the water-highway were masses of black—blackest of all where they showed against the stars. The ear sought in vain for any sound of human life; there was nothing but the lapping of the water along the side of the boat, and the slow, monotonous plash of the oar.

Father and farther into the silence and the darkness; and now here and there a window, close down to the water, and heavily barred with rectangular bars of iron, shows a dull red light; but there is no sound, nor any passing shadow within. The man who is standing by the hearse-like cabin of the gondola observes and thinks. These black buildings; the narrow and secret canals; the stillness of the night: are they not suggestive enough—of revenge, a quick blow, and the silence of the grave? And now, as the gondola still glides on, there is heard a slow and distant tolling of bells. The Deed is done, then?—no longer will the piteous hands be thrust out of the barred window—no longer will the wild cry for help startle the passer-by in the night-time. And now again, as the gondola goes on its way, another sound—still more muffled and indistinct—the sound of a church organ, with the solemn chanting of voices. Are they praying for the soul of the dead? The sound becomes more and more distant; the gondola goes on its way.

The new-comer has no further time for these idle fancies. At the Rialto bridge he stops the gondola, pays the man, and goes ashore. Then, rapidly ascending the steps, he crosses the bridge, descends the other side, and again jumps into a gondola. All this the work of a few seconds.

But it was obvious he had been expected. He gave no instructions to the two men in this second gondola. They instantly went to work, and with a rapid and powerful stroke sent the boat along—with an occasional warning cry as they swept by the entrance to one or other of the smaller canals. Finally, they abruptly left the Grand Canal, close by the Corte d'Appello, and shot into a narrow opening that seemed little more than a slit between the buildings.

Here they had to go more cautiously; the orange light of their lamp shining as they passed on the empty archways, and on the iron-barred windows, and slimy steps. And always this strange silence in the dead or sleeping city, and the monotonous plash of the oars, and the deep low cry of "Sia premi!" or "Sia stali!" to give warning of their approach. But, indeed, that warning was unnecessary; they were absolutely alone in this labyrinth of gloomy water-ways.

At length they shot beneath a low bridge, and stopped at some steps immediately beyond. Here one of the men, getting out, proceeded to act as guide to the stranger. They had not far to go. They passed first of all into a long, low, and foul-smelling archway, in the middle of which was a narrow aperture protected by an iron gate. The man lit a candle, opened the gate, and preceded his companion along a passage and up a stone staircase. The atmosphere of the place was damp and sickly; the stair-case was not more than three feet in width; the feeble glimmer of the candle did but little to dispel the darkness. Even that was withdrawn; for the guide, having knocked thrice at a door, blew out the candle, and retreated down-stairs.

"The night is dark, brother."

"The dawn is near."

Instantly the door was thrown open; the dark figure of a man was seen against the light; he said, "Come in! come in!" and his hand was outstretched. The stranger seemed greatly surprised.

"What, you, Calabressa!" he exclaimed. "Your time has not yet expired!"

"What, no? My faith, I have made it expire!" said the other, airily, and introducing a rather badly pronounced French word or two into his Italian. "But come in, come in; take a seat. You are early; you may have to wait."

He was an odd-looking person, this tall, thin, elderly man, with the flowing yellow-white hair and the albino eyes. There was a semi-military look about his braided coat; but, on the other hand, he wore the cap of a German student—of purple velvet, with a narrow leather peak. He seemed to be proud of his appearance. He had a gay manner.

"Yes, I am escaped. Ah, how fine it is! You walk about all day as you please; you smoke cigarettes; you have your coffee; you go to look at the young English ladies who come to feed the pigeons in the place."

He raised two fingers to his lips, and blew a kiss to all the world.

"Such complexions! A wild rose in every cheek! But listen, now; this is not about an English young lady. I go up to the Church of St. Mark—besides the bronze horses. I am enjoying the air, when I hear a sound; I turn; over there I see open windows; ah! the figure in the white dressing-gown! It is the *diva* herself. They play the *Barbier* to-night, and she is practicing as she dusts her room. *Una voce poco fa*—it thrills all through the square. She puts the ornaments on the mantel-piece straight. *Lo giurai, la vincerò!*—she goes to the mirror and makes the most beautiful attitude. Ah, what a spectacle—the black hair all down—the white dressing-gown—*In sono docile*"—and again he kissed his two fingers. Then he said,

"But now, you. You do not look one day older. And how is Natalie?"

"Natalie is well, I believe," said the other, gravely.

"You are a strange man. You have not a soft heart for the pretty creatures of the world; you are implacable. The little Natalushka, then; how is she?"

"The little Natalushka is grown big now; she is quite a woman."

"A woman! She will marry an Englishman, and become very rich: is not that so?"

"Natalie—I mean, Natalushka will not marry," said the other coldly. "She knows she is very useful to me. She knows I have no other."

"*Maintenant*: the business—how goes that?"

"Elsewhere, well; in England, not quite so well," said Ferdinand Lind. "But what can you expect? The English think they have no need of co-operation, except to get their groceries cheap. Why, everything is done in the open air there. If a scoundrel gets a lash too many in prison, you have it before Parliament next week. If a school-boy is kicked by his master, you have all the newspapers in the country ablaze. The newspapers govern England. A penny journal has more power than the commander-in-chief."

"Then why do you remain in England?"

"It is the safest for me, personally. Then there is most to be done there. Again, it is the head-quarters of money. Do you see, Calabressa? One must have money, or one cannot work."

The albino-looking man lit a cigarette.

"You despair, then, of England? No, you never despair."

"There is a prospect. The Southern Englishman is apathetic; he is interested only, as I have said, in getting his

called any longer by my nursery name; but if you will fight for my country, I will marry you when I grow up.' "

Light-hearted as this man Calabressa was, having escaped from prison, and eagerly inclined for chatter, after so long a spell of enforced silence, he could not fail to perceive that his companion was hardly listening to him.

"Mais, mon frere, a quoi bon le regarder?" he said, peevishly. "If it must come, it will come. Or is it the poor cardinal you pity? That was a good name they invented for him, anyway—*il cardinale affamatore*."

Again the bell rung, and Ferdinand Lind started. When he turned to the door, it was with a look on his face of some anxiety and apprehension—a look but rarely seen there. Then the *portiere* was drawn aside to let some one come through: at the same moment Lind caught a brief glimpse of a number of men sitting round a small table.

The person who now appeared, and whom Lind saluted with great respect, was a little, sallow-complexioned man, with an intensely black beard and mustache, and a worn expression of face. He returned Lind's salutation gravely, and said,

"Brother, the Council thank you for your prompt answer to the summons. Meanwhile, nothing is decided. You will attend here to-morrow night."

"At what hour, Brother Granaglia?"

"Ten. You will now be conveyed back to the Rialto steps; from thence you can get to your hotel."

Lind bowed acquiescence; and the stranger passed again through the *portiere* and disappeared.

CHAPTER X.

VACILLATION.

"EVELYN, I distrust that man Lind."

The speaker was George Brand, who kept impatiently pacing up and down those rooms of his, while his friend, with a dreamy look on the pale and fine face, lay back in an easy-chair, and gazed out of the clear panes before him. It was night; the blinds had not been drawn; and the row of windows, framed by their scarlet curtains, seemed a series of dark-blue pictures, all throbbing with points of golden fire.

"Is there any one you do not distrust?" said Lord Evelyn, absently.

"I hope so. But with regard to Lind: I had distinctly to let him know he must not assume that I am mixed up in any of his schemes until I definitely say so. When, in answer to my vague proposal, he told me I had already pledged myself, I confess I was startled for a moment. Of course it was all very well for him afterward to speak of my declared sympathy, and of my promise to reveal nothing, as being quite enough, at least for the earlier stage. If that is so, you may easily acquire adherents. But either I join with a definite pledge, or not at all."

"I am inclined to think you had better not join," said Lord Evelyn, calmly.

After that there was silence; and Brand's companion lay and looked on the picture outside, that was so dark and solemn and still. In the midst of all that blaze of various and trembling lights was the unseen river—unseen but for the myriad reflections that showed the ripples of the water; then the far-reaching rows of golden stars, spanning the bridges, and marking out the long Embankment sweep beyond St. Thomas's Hospital. On the other side black masses of houses—all their commonplace detail lost in the mysterious shadow; and over them the silver crescent of the moon just strong enough to give an edge of white to a tall shot-tower. Then far away in the east, in the clear dark sky, the dim gray ghost of a dome; scarcely visible, and yet revealing its presence; the great dome of St. Paul's.

This beautiful, still scene—the silence was so intense that the footfall of a cab-horse crossing Waterloo Bridge could be faintly heard, as the eye followed the light slowly moving between the two rows of golden stars—seemed to possess but little interest for the owner of these rooms. For the moment he had lost altogether his habitual air of proud reserve.

"Evelyn," he said, abruptly, "was it not in these very rooms you insisted that, if the work was good, one need not be too scrupulous about one's associates?"

"I believe so," said the other, indifferently: he had almost lost hope of ever overcoming his friend's inveterate suspicion.

"Well," Brand said, "there is something in that. I believe in the work that Lind is engaged in, if I am doubtful about him. And if it pleases you or him to say that I have joined you merely because I express sympathy, and promise to say nothing, well and good. But you: you are more than that?"

The question somewhat startled Lord Evelyn; and his pale face flushed a little.

"Oh yes," he said; "of course. I—I cannot precisely explain to you."

"I understand. But, if I did really join, I should at least have you for a companion."

Lord Evelyn turned and regarded him.

"If you were to join, it might be that you and I should never see each other again in this world. Have I not told you?—Your first pledge is that of absolute obedience; you have no longer a right to your own life; you become a slave, that others may be free."

"And you would have me place myself in the power of a man like Lind?" Brand exclaimed.

"If it were necessary," said Lord Evelyn, "I should hold myself absolutely at the bidding of Lind; for I am convinced he is an honest man, as he is a man of great ability and unconquerable energy and will. But you would no more put yourself in Lind's power than in mine. Lind is a servant, like the rest of us. It is true he has in some ways a sort of quasi-independent position, which I don't quite understand; but as regards the Society that I have joined, and that you would join, he is a servant, as you would be a servant. But what is the use of talking? Your temperament isn't fitted for this kind of work."

"I want to see my way clear," Brand said, almost to himself.

"Ah, that is just it; whereas, you must go blindfold."

Thereafter again silence. The moon had risen higher now; and the paths in the Embankment gardens just below them had grown gray in the clearer light. Lord Evelyn lay and watched the light of a hansom that was rattling along by the side of the river.

"Do you remember," said Brand, with a smile, "your repeating some verses here one night; and my suspecting you had borrowed the inspiration somewhere? My boy, I have found you out. What I guessed was true. I made bold to ask Miss Lind to read, that evening I came up with them from Dover."

"I know it," said Lord Evelyn, quietly.

"You have seen her, then?" was the quick question.

"No; she wrote to me."

"Oh, she writes to you?" the other said.

"Well, you see, I did not know her father had gone abroad, and I called. As a rule, she sees no one while her father is

away ; on the other hand, she will not say she is not at home if she is at home. So she wrote me a note of apology for refusing to see me ; and in it she told me you had been very kind to them, and how she had tried to read, and had read very badly, because she feared your criticism—”

“I never heard anything like it !” Brand said ; and then he corrected himself. “Well, yes, I have ; I have heard you, Evelyn. You have been an admirable pupil.”

“Now when I think of it,” said his friend, putting his hand in his breast-pocket, “this letter is mostly about you, Brand. Let me see if there is anything in it you may not see. No ; it is all very nice and friendly.”

He was about to hand over the letter, when he stopped.

“I do believe,” he said, looking at Brand, “that you are capable of thinking Natalie wrote this letter on purpose you should see it.”

“Then you do me a great injustice,” Brand said, without anger. “And you do her a great injustice. I do not think it needs any profoundj udge of character to see what that girl is.”

“For that is one thing I could never forgive you, Brand.”

“What ?”

“If you were to suspect Natalie Lind.”

This was no private and confidential communication that passed into Brand’s hand, but a frank, gossiping, sisterly note, stretching out beyond its initial purpose. And there was no doubt at all that it was mostly about Brand himself ; and the reader grew red as he went on. He had been so kind to them at Dover ; and so interested in her papa’s work ; and so anxious to be of service and in sympathy with them. And then she spoke as if he were definitely pledged to them ; and how proud she was to have another added to the list of her friends. George Brand’s face was as red as his beard when he folded up the letter. He did not immediately return it.

“What a wonderful woman that is !” said he, after a time. “I did not think it would be left for a foreigner to teach me to believe in England.”

Lord Evelyn looked up.

“Oh,” Brand said, instantly, “I know what you would ask : ‘What is my belief worth ?’ ‘How much do I sympathize ?’ Well, I can give you a plain answer : a shilling in the pound income-tax. If England is this stronghold of the liberties of Europe—if it is her business to be the lamp-bearer of freedom—if she must keep her shores inviolate as the

refuge of those who are oppressed and persecuted, well, then, I would pay a shilling income-tax, or double that, treble that, to give her a navy that would sweep the seas. For a big army there is neither population, nor sustenance, nor room ; but I would give her such a navy as would let her put the world to defiance."

"I wish Natalie would teach you to believe in a few other things while she is about it," said his friend, with a slight and rather sad smile.

"For example?"

"In human nature a little bit, for example. In the possibility of a woman being something else than a drawing-room peacock, or worse. Do you think she could make you believe that it is possible for a woman to be noble-minded, unselfish, truth-speaking, modest, and loyal-hearted?"

"I presume you are describing Natalie Lind herself."

"Oh," said his friend, with a quick surprise, "then you admit there may be an exception, after all? You do not condemn the whole race of them now, as being incapable of even understanding what frank dealing is, or honor, or justice, or anything beyond their own vain and selfish caprices?"

George Brand went to the window.

"Perhaps," said he, "my experience of women has been unfortunate, unusual. I have not had much chance, especially of late years, of studying them in their quiet domestic spheres. But otherwise I suppose my experience is not unusual. Every man begins his life, in his salad days, by believing the world to be a very fine thing, and women particularly to be very wonderful creatures—angels, in short, of goodness, and mercy, and truth, and all the rest of it. Then, judging by what I have seen and heard, I should say that about nineteen men out of twenty get a regular facer—just at the most sensitive period of their life; and then they suddenly believe that women are devils, and the world a delusion. It is bad logic; but they are not in a mood for reason. By-and-by the process of recovery begins: with some short, with others long. But the spring-time of belief, and hope, and rejoicing—I doubt whether that ever comes back."

He spoke without any bitterness. If the facts of the world were so, they had to be accepted.

"I swallowed my dose of experience a good many years ago," he continued, "but I haven't got it out of my blood yet. However, I will admit to you the possibility of there being a few women like Natalie Lind."

"Well, this is better, at all events," Lord Evelyn said, cheerfully.

"Beauty, of course, is a dazzling and dangerous thing," Brand said; "for a man always wants to believe that fine eyes and a sweet voice have a sweet soul behind them. And very often he finds behind them something in the shape of a soul that a dog or a cat would be ashamed to own. But as for Natalie Lind, I don't think one can be deceived. She shows too much. She vibrates too quickly—too inadvertently—to little chance touches. I did suspect her, I will confess. I thought she was hired to play the part of decoy. But I had not seen her for ten minutes before I was convinced she was playing no part at all."

"But goodness gracious, Brand, what are we coming to?" Lord Evelyn said, with a laugh. "What! We already believe in England, and patriotism, and the love of freedom? And we are prepared to admit that there is one woman—positively, in the world, one woman—who is not a cheat and a selfish coquette? Why, where are we to end?"

"I don't think I said only one woman," Brand replied, quite good-naturedly; and then he added, with a smile, "You ask where we are to end. Suppose I were to accept your new religion, Evelyn? Would that please you? And would it please her, too?"

"Ah!" said his companion, looking up with a quick glance of pleasure. But he would argue no more.

"Perhaps I have been too suspicious. It is a habit; I have had to look after myself pretty much through the world; and I don't overvalue the honesty of people I don't know. But when I once set my hand to the work, I am not likely to draw back."

"You could be of so much more value to them than I can," said Lord Evelyn, wistfully. "I don't suppose you spend more than half of your income."

"Oh, as to that," said Brand, at once, "that is a very different matter. If they like to take myself and what I can do, well and good; money is a very different thing."

His companion raised himself in his chair; and there was surprise on his face.

"How can you help them so well as with your money?" he cried. "Why, it is the very thing they want most."

"Oh, indeed!" said Brand, coldly. "You see, Evelyn, my father was a business man; and I may have inherited a commercial way of looking at things. If I were to give away a lot of money to unknown people, for unknown purposes,

I should say that I was being duped, and that they were putting the money in their own pocket."

"My dear fellow!" Lord Evelyn protested; "the need of money is most urgent. There are printing-presses to be kept going; agents to be paid; police-spies to be bribed—there is an enormous work to be done, and money must be spent."

"All the same," said Brand, who was invariably most resolved when he was most quiet in his manner, "I shall prefer not running the chance of being duped in that direction. Besides, I am bound in honor not to do anything of the kind. I can fling myself away—this is my own lookout; and my life, or the way I spend it, is not of great consequence to me. But my father's property, if anything happens to me, ought to go intact to my sister's boys, to whom, indeed, I have left it by will. I will say to Lind, 'Is it myself or my money that is wanted: you must choose.'"

"The question would be an insult."

"Oh, do you think so? Very well; I will not ask it. But that is the understanding." Then he added, more lightly, "Why, would you have the Pilgrim start with his pocket full of sovereigns? His staff and his wallet are all he is entitled to. And when one is going to make a big plunge, shouldn't one strip?"

There was no answer; for Lord Evelyn's quick ear had caught the sound of wheels in the adjacent street.

"There is my trap," he said, looking at his watch as he rose.

Waters brought the young man his coat, and then went out to light him down-stairs.

"Good-night, Brand. Glad to see you are getting into a wholesomer frame of mind. I shall tell Natalie you are now prepared to admit that there is in the world at least one woman who is not a cheat."

"I hope you will not utter a word to Miss Lind of any of the nonsense we have been talking," said Brand, hastily, and with his face grown red.

"All right. By-the-way, when are you coming up to see the girls?"

"To-morrow afternoon: will that do?"

"Very well; I shall wait in."

"Let me see if I remember the order aright," said Brand, holding up his fingers and counting. "Rosalys, Blanche, Ermentrude, Agnes, Jane, Frances, Geraldine: correct?"

"Quite. I think their mother must forget at times. Well, good-night."

"Good-night—good-night!"

Brand returned to the empty room, and threw wide open one of the windows. The air was singularly mild for a night in March; but he had been careful of his friend. Then he dropped into an easy-chair, and opened a letter.

It was the letter from Natalie Lind, which he had held in his hand ever since, eagerly hoping that Evelyn would forget it—as, in fact, he had done. And now with what a strange interest he read and re-read it; and weighed all its phrases; and tried to picture her as she wrote these lines; and studied even the peculiarities of the handwriting. There was a quaint, foreign look here and there—the capital B, for example, was written in German fashion; and that letter occurred a good many times. It was Mr. Brand, and Mr. Brand, over and over again—in this friendly and frank gossip, which had all the brightness of a chat over a new acquaintance who interests one. He turned to the signature. "*Your friend, Natalie.*"

Then he walked up and down, slowly and thoughtfully; but ever and again he would turn to the letter to see that he had quite accurately remembered what she had said about the delight of the sail from Calais, and the beautiful flowers at Dover and her gladness at the prospect of their having this new associate and friend. Then the handwriting again. The second stroke of the N in her name had a little notch at the top—German fashion. It looked a pretty name, as she wrote it.

Then he went to the window, and leaned on the brass bar, and looked out on the dark and sleeping world, with its countless golden points of fire. He remained there a long time, thinking—of the past, in which he had fancied his life was buried; of the present, with its bewildering uncertainties; of the future, with its fascinating dreams. There might be a future for him, then, after all; and hope; and the joy of companionship? Surely that letter meant at least so much.

But then the boundlessness, the eager impatience, of human wishes! Farther and farther, as he leaned and looked out, without seeing much of the wonderful spectacle before him, went his thoughts and eager hopes and desires. Companionship; but with whom? And might not the spring-time of life come back again, as it was now coming back to the world in the sweet new air that had begun to blow from the South? And what message did the soft night-wind bring him but the name of Natalie? And Natalie was written in the clear and

shining heavens, in letters of fire and joy ; and the river spoke of Natalie ; and the darkness murmured Natalie.

But his heart, whispering to him—there, in the silence of the night, in the time when dreams abound, and visions of what may be—his heart, whispering to him, said—“Natalushka !”

CHAPTER XI.

A COMMISSION.

WHEN Ferdinand Lind looked out the next day from the window of his hotel, it was not at all the Venice of chromolithography that lay before him. The morning was wild, gray, and gloomy, with a blustering wind blowing down from the north ; the broad expanse of green water ruffled and lashed by continual squalls ; the sea-gulls wheeling and dipping over the driven waves ; the dingy masses of shipping huddled along the wet and deserted quays ; the long spur of the Lido a thin black line between the green sea and purple sky ; and the domed churches over there, and the rows of tall and narrow and grumbling palaces overlooking the canals nearer at hand, all alike dismal and bedraggled and dark.

When he went outside he shivered ; but at all events these cold, damp odors of the sea and the rainy wind were more grateful than the mustiness of the hotel. But the deserted look of the place ! The gondolas, with their hearse-like coverings on, lay empty and untended by the steps, as if waiting for a funeral procession. The men had taken shelter below the archways, where they formed groups, silent, uncomfortable, sulky. The few passers-by on the wet quays hurried along with their voluminous black cloaks wrapped round their shoulders, and hiding most of the mahogany-colored faces. Even the plague of beggars had been dispersed ; they had slunk away shivering into the foul-smelling nooks and crannies. There was not a soul to give a handful of maize to the pigeons in the Place of St. Mark.

But when Lind had got round into the Place, what was his surprise to find Calabressa having his breakfast in the open air at a small table in front of a *café*. He was quite alone there ; but he seemed much content. In fact, he was laughing heartily, all to himself, at something he had been reading in the newspaper open before him.

“Well,” said Lind, when they had exchanged salutations,

"this is a pleasant sort of a morning for one to have one's breakfast outside!"

"My faith," said Calabressa, "if you had taken as many breakfasts as I have shut up in a hole, you would be glad to get the chance of a mouthful of fresh air. Sit down, my friend."

Lind glanced round, and then sat down.

"My good friend Calabressa," he said presently, "for one connected as you are with certain persons, do you not think now that your costume is a little conspicuous? And then your sitting out here in broad daylight—"

"My friend Lind," said he, with a laugh, "I am as safe here as if I were in Naples, which I believe to be the safest place in the world for one not in good odor with the authorities. And if there was a risk, would I not run it to hear my little nightingale over there when she opens the casements? Ah! she is the most charming Rosina in the world."

"Yes, yes," said Lind. "I am not speaking of you. But—the others. The police must guess you are not here for nothing."

"Oh, the others? Rest assured. The police might as well try to put their fingers on a globule of quicksilver. It is but three days since they left the Piazza del Popolo, Torre del Greco. To-morrow, if their business is finished to-night, they will vanish again; and I shall be dismissed."

"If their business is finished?" repeated Lind, absently. "Yes; but I should like to know why they have summoned me all the way from England. They cannot mean—"

"My dear friend Lind," said Calabressa, "you must not look so grave. Nothing that is going to happen is worth one's troubling one's self about. It is the present moment that is of consequence; and at the present moment I have a joke for you. You know Armfeldt, who is now at Berne: they had tried him only four times in Berlin; and there was only a little matter of nine years' sentence against him. Listen."

He took up the *Osservatore*, and read out a paragraph, stating that Dr. Julius Armfeldt had again been tried *in contumaciam*, and sentenced to a further term of two years' imprisonment, for seditious writing. Further, the publisher of his latest pamphlet, a citizen of Berne, had likewise been sentenced in his absence to twelve months' imprisonment.

"Do they think Armfeldt will live to be a centenarian, that they keep heaping up those sentences against him? Or is it as another inducement for him to go back to his native coun-

try and give himself up? It is a great joke, this childish proceeding; but a Government should not declare itself impotent. It is like the Austrians when they hanged you and the others in effigy. Now I remember, the little Natalushka was grieved that she was not born then; for she wished to see the spectacle, and to have killed the people who insulted her father."

"I am afraid it is no joke at all," Lind said, gloomily. "Those Swiss people are craven. What can you expect from a nation of hotel-waiters? They cringe before every bully in Europe; you will find that, if Bismarck insists, the Federal Council will expel Armfeldt from Switzerland directly. No; the only safe refuge nowadays for the reformers, the Protestants the pioneers of Europe, is England; and the English do not know it; they do not think of it. They are so accustomed to freedom that they believe that is the only possible condition, and that other nations must necessarily enjoy it. When you talk to them of tyranny, of political persecution, they laugh. They cannot understand such a thing existing. They fancy it ceased when Bomba's dungeons were opened."

"For my part," said Calabressa, lighting a cigarette, and calling for a small glass of cognac, "I am content with Naples."

"And the protection of pickpockets?"

"My friend," said the other, coolly, "if you refer to the most honorable the association of the Camorristi, I would advise you not to speak too loud."

Calabressa rose, having settled his score with the waiter.

"Allons!" said he. "What are you going to do to day?"

"I don't know," said Lind, discontentedly. "May the devil fly away with this town of Venice! I never come here but it is either freezing or suffocating."

"You are in an evil humor to-day, friend Lind; you have caught the English spleen. Come, I have a little business to do over at Murano; the breeze will do you good. And I will tell you the story of my escape."

The time had to be passed somehow. Lind walked with his companion along to the steps, descended, and jumped into a gondola, and presently they were shooting out into the turbulent green water that the wind drove against the side of the boat in a succession of sharp shocks. Seated in the little funereal compartment, they could talk without much fear of being heard by either of the men; and Calabressa began his tale. It was not romantic. It was simply a case of bribery: the money to effect which had certainly not come out of

Calabressa's shallow pockets. In the midst of the story—or, at least, before the end of it—Lind said, in a low voice,

“Calabressa, have you any sure grounds for what you said about Zaccatelli?”

His companion glanced quickly outside.

“It is you are now indiscreet,” he said, in an equally low voice. “But yes; I think that is the business. However,” he added, in a gayer tone, “what matter? To-day is not to-morrow; to-morrow will shift for itself.” And therewith he continued his story, though his listener seemed singularly preoccupied and thoughtful.

They arrived at the island, got out, and walked into the courtyard of one of the smaller glass-works. There were one or two of the workmen passing; and here something occurred that seemed to arrest Lind's attention.

“What, here also?” said he, in a low voice.

“Every one; the master included. It is with him I have to do this little piece of business. Now you will be so good as to wait for a short time, will you not?—and it is warm in there; I will be with you soon.”

Lind walked into the large workshop, where there were a number of people at work, all round the large, circular, covered caldron, the various apertures into which sent out fierce rays of light and heat. He walked about, seemingly at his ease; looking at the apprentices experimenting; chatting to the workmen. And at last he asked one of these to make for him a little vase in opalescent glass, that he could take to his daughter in England; and could he put the letter N on it somewhere? It was at least some occupation, watching the quick and dexterous handling under which the little vase grew into form, and had its decoration cleverly pinched out, and its tiny bits of color added. The letter N was not very successful; but then Natalie would know that her father had been thinking of her at Venice.

This excursion at all events tided over the forenoon; and when the two companions returned to the wet and disconsolate city, Calabressa was easily persuaded to join his friend in some sort of mid-day meal. After that, the long-haired albino-looking person took his leave, having arranged how Lind was to keep the assignation for that evening.

The afternoon cleared up somewhat; but Ferdinand Lind seemed to find it dull enough. He went out for an aimless stroll through some of the narrow back streets, slowly making his way among the crowd that poured along these various ways. Then he returned to his hotel, and wrote some

letters. Then he dined early; but still the time did not seem to pass. He resolved on getting through an hour or so at the theatre.

A gondola swiftly took him away through the labyrinth of small and gloomy canals, until at length the wan orange glare shining out into the night showed him that he was drawing near one of the entrances to the Fenice. If he had been less preoccupied—less eager to think of nothing but how to get the slow hours over—he might have noticed the strangeness of the scene before him: the successive gondolas stealing silently up through the gloom to the palely lit stone steps; the black coffins appearing to open; and then figures in white and scarlet opera-cloaks getting out into the dim light, to ascend into the brilliant glare of the theatre staircase. He, too, followed, and got into the place assigned to him. But this spectacular display failed to interest him. He turned to the bill, to remind him what he had to see. The blaze of color on the stage—the various combinations of movement—the resounding music—all seemed part of a dream; and it annoyed him somehow. He rose and left.

The intervening time he spent chiefly in a *casse* close by the theatre, where he smoked cigarettes and appeared to read the newspapers. Then he wandered away to the spot appointed for him to meet a particular gondola, and arrived there half an hour too soon. But the gondola was there also. He jumped in and was carried away through the silence of the night.

When he arrived at the door, which was opened to him by Calabressa, he contrived to throw off, by a strong effort of will, any appearance of anxiety. He entered and sat down, saying only,

“Well!—what news?”

Calabressa laughed slightly; and went to a cupboard, and brought forth a bottle and two small glasses.

“If you were Zaccatelli,” he said, “I would say to you, ‘My Lord,’ or ‘Your Excellency,’ or whatever they call those flamingoes with the bullet heads, ‘I would advise you to take a little drop of this very excellent cognac, for you are about to hear something, and you will need steady nerves.’ Meanwhile, Brother Lind, it is not forbidden to you and me to have a glass. The Council provide excellent liquor.”

“Thank you, I have no need of it,” said Lind, coldly. “What do you mean about Zaccatelli?”

“This,” said the other, filling himself out a glass of the brandy, and then proceeding to prepare a cigarette. “If

the moral scene of the country, too long outraged, should determine to punish the Starving Cardinal, I believe he will get a good year's notice to prepare for his doom. You perceive? What harm does sudden death to a man? It is nothing. A moment of pain; and you have all the happiness of sleep, indifference, forgetfulness. That is no punishment at all: do you perceive?"

Calabressa continued, airily—

"People are proud when they say they do not fear death. The fools! What has any one to fear in death? To the poor it means no more hunger, no more imprisonment, no more cold and sickness, no more watching of your children when they are suffering and you cannot help; to the rich it means no more triumph of rivals, and envy, and jealousy; no more sleepless nights and ennui of days; no more gout, and gravel, and the despair of growing old. Death! It is the great emancipation. And people talk of the punishment of death!"

He gave a long whistle of contempt.

"But," said he, with a smile, "it is a little bit different if you have to look forward to your death on a certain fixed day. Then you begin to overvalue things—a single hour of life becomes something."

He added, in a tone of affected condolence—

"Then one wouldn't wish to cause any poor creature to say his last adieux without some preparation. And in the case of a cardinal, is a year too little for repentance? Oh, he will put it to excellent use."

"Very well, very well," said Ferdinand Lind, with an impatient frown gathering over the shaggy eyebrows. "But I want to know what I have to do with all this?"

"Brother Lind," said the other, mildly, "if the Secretary Granaglia, knowing that I am a friend of yours, is so kind as to give me some hints of what is under discussion, I listen, but I ask no questions. And you—I presume you are here not to protest, but to obey."

"Understand me, Calabressa: it was only to you as a friend that I spoke," said Lind, gravely. And then he added, "The Council will not find, at all events, that I am recusant."

A few minutes afterward the bell rung, and Calabressa jumped to his feet; while Lind, in spite of himself, started. Presently the *portiere* was drawn aside, and the little sallow-complexioned man whom he had seen on the previous evening entered the room. On this occasion, however, Calabressa

was motioned to withdraw, and immediately did so. Lind and the stranger were left together.

"I need scarcely inform you, Brother Lind," said he, in a slow and matter-of-fact way, "that I am the authorized spokesman of the Council."

As he said this, for a moment he rested his hand on the table. There was on the forefinger a large ring, with a red stone in it, engraved. Lind bowed acquiescence.

"Calabressa has no doubt informed you of the matter before the Council. That is now decided; the decree has been signed. Zaccatelli dies within a year from this day. The motives which have led to this decision may hereafter be explained to you, even if they have not already occurred to you; they are motives of policy, as regards ourselves and the progress of our work, as well as of justice."

Ferdinand Lind listened, without response.

"It has further been decided that the blow be struck from England."

"England!" was the involuntary exclamation.

"Yes," said the other, calmly. "To give full effect to such a warning it must be clear to the world that it has nothing to do with any private revenge or low intrigue. Assassination has been too frequent in Italy of late. The doubting throughout the world must be convinced that we have agents everywhere; and that we are no mere local society for the revenging of private wrongs."

Lind again bowed assent.

"Further," said the other, regarding him, "the Council charge you with the execution of the decree."

Lind had almost expected this: he did not flinch.

"After twelve months' grace granted, you will be prepared with a sure and competent agent who will give effect to the decree of the Council; failing such a one, the duty will devolve on your own shoulders."

"On mine!" he was forced to exclaim. "Surely—"

"Do you forget," said the other, calmly, "that sixteen years ago your life was forfeited, and given back to you by the Council?"

"So I understood," said Lind. "But it was not my life that was given me then!—only the lease of it till the Council should claim it again. However!"

He drew himself up, and the powerful face was full of decision.

"It is well," said he. "I do not complain. If I exact

obedience from others, I, too, obey. The Council shall be served."

"Further instructions shall be given you. Meanwhile, the Council once more thank you for your attendance. Farewell, brother!"

"Farewell, brother!"

When he had gone, and the bell again rung, Calabressa reappeared. Lind was too proud a man to betray any concern.

"It is as you told me, Calabressa," said he, carelessly, as his friend proceeded to light him down the narrow staircase. "And I am charged with the execution of their vengeance. Well; I wish I had been present at their deliberations, that is all. This deed may answer so far as the continental countries are concerned; but, so far as England is concerned, it will undo the work of years."

"What!—England!" exclaimed Calabressa, lightly—"where they blow up a man's house with gunpowder, or dash vitriol in his face, if he works for a shilling a day less wages?—where they shoot landlords from behind hedges if the rent is raised?—where they murder policemen in the open street, to release political prisoners? No, no, friend Lind; I cannot believe that."

"However, that is not my business, Calabressa. The Council shall be obeyed. I am glad to know you are again at liberty; when you come to England you will see how your little friend Natalie has grown."

"Give a kiss from me to the little Natalushka," said he, cheerfully; and then the two parted.

CHAPTER XII.

JACTA EST ALEA.

"NATALIE," said her father, entering the breakfast-room, "I have news for you to-day. This evening Mr. Brand is to be initiated."

The beautiful, calm face betrayed no surprise.

"That is always the way," she answered, almost absently. "One after the other they go in; and I only am left out, alone."

"What," he said, patting her shoulder as he passed, "are you still dreaming of reviving the *Giardiniera*? Well, it

was a pretty idea to call each sister in the lodge by the name of a flower. But nowadays, and in England especially, if women intermeddled in such things, do you know what they would be called? *Petroleuses!*"

"Names do not hurt," said the girl, proudly.

"No, no. Rest content, Natalie. You are initiated far enough. You know all that needs to be known; and you can work with us, and associate with us like the rest. But about Brand; are you not pleased?"

"I am indeed pleased, papa."

"And I am more than pleased," said Lind, thoughtfully. "He will be the most important accession we have had for many a day. Ah, you women have sharp eyes; but there are some things you cannot see—there are some men whose character you cannot read."

Natalie glanced up quickly; and her father noticed that surprised look.

"Well," said he, with a smile, "what now is your opinion of Mr. Brand?"

Instantly the soft eyes were cast down again, and a faint tinge of color appeared in her face.

"Oh, my opinion, papa?" said she, as if to gain time to choose her words. "Well, I should call him manly, straightforward—and—and very kind—and—and very English—"

"I understand you perfectly, Natalie," her father said, with a laugh. "You and Lord Evelyn are quite in accord. Yes, and you are both thoroughly mistaken. You mean, by his being so English, that he is cold, critical, unsympathetic: is it not so? You resent his being cautious about joining us. You think he will be but a lukewarm associate—suspecting everything—fearful about going too far—a half-and-half ally. My dear Natalie, that is because neither Lord Evelyn nor you know anything at all about that man."

The faint color in the girl's cheeks had deepened; and she remained silent, with her face downcast.

"The pliable ones," her father continued, "the people who are moved by fine talking, who are full of amiable sentiments, and who take to work like ours as an additional sentiment—you may initiate a thousand of them, and not gain an atom of strength. It is a hard head that I want, and a strong will; a man determined to have no illusions at the outset; a man who, once pledged, will not despair or give up in the face of failure, difficulty, or disappointment, or anything else. Brand is such a man. If I were to be disabled

to-morrow, I would rather leave my work in his hands than in the hands of any man I have seen in this country."

Was it to hide the deepening color in her face that the girl went round to her father, and stood rather behind him, and put her hand on his shoulder, and stooped down to his ear.

"Papa," said she, "I—I hope you don't think I have been saying anything against Mr. Brand. Oh no. How could I do that—when he has been so kind to us—and—and just now especially, when he is about to become one of us? You must forget what I said about his being English, papa; after all, it is not for us to say that being English is anything else than being kind, and generous, and hospitable. And I am exceedingly pleased that you have got another associate, and that we have got another good friend, in England."

"Alors, as Calabressa would say, you can show that you are pleased, Natalie," her father said, lightly, "by going and writing a pretty little note, asking your new friend, Mr. Brand, to dine with us to-night, after the initiation is over, and I will ask Evelyn, if I see him."

But this proposal in no wise seemed to lessen the girl's embarrassment. She still clung about the back of her father's chair.

"I would rather not do that, papa," said she, after a second.

"Why? why?" said he.

"Would it not look less formal for you to ask him, papa? You see, it is once or twice that we have asked him to dine with us without giving him proper notice—"

"Oh, that is nothing—nothing at all. A bachelor with an evening disengaged is glad enough to fill it up anyhow. Well, if you would rather not write, Natalie, I will ask him myself."

"Thank you, papa," said she, apparently much relieved; and therewith she went back to her seat, and her father turned to his newspaper.

The day passed, and the evening came. As six o'clock was striking, George Brand presented himself at the little door in Lisle street, Soho, and was admitted. Lind had already assured him that, as far as England was concerned, no idle mummeries were associated with the ceremony of initiation; to which Brand had calmly replied, that if mummeries were considered necessary, he was as ready as any one to do his part of the business. Only he added that he thought the unknown powers had acted wisely—so far as England was concerned—in discarding such things.

When he entered the room, his first glance round was reassuring. There were six persons present besides Lind, and they did not at all suggest the typical Leicester Square foreigner. On the contrary, he guessed that four out of the six were either English or Irish; and two of them he recognized, though they were unknown to him personally. The one was a Home Rule M. P., ferocious enough in the House of Commons, but celebrated as the most brilliant, and amiable, and fascinating of diners-out; the other was an Oxford don, of large fortune and wildly Radical views, who wrote a good deal in the papers. There was a murmur of conversation going on, which ceased as Lind briefly introduced the new-comer.

The ceremony, if ceremony it could be called, was simple enough. The candidate for admission was required to sign a printed document, solemnly pledging himself to devote his life, and the labor of his hands and brain, to the work of the association; to implicitly obey any command reaching him from the Council, or communicated through an officer of the first degree; and to preserve inviolable secrecy. Brand read this paper through twice, and signed it. It was then signed by the seven witnesses. He was further required to inscribe his signature in a large volume, which contained a list of members of a particular section. That done, the six strangers present shook him by the hand, and left.

He looked round surprised, Had he been dreaming during these brief five minutes? Yet he could hear the noise of their going down-stairs.

"Well," said Mr. Lind, with a smile, "it is not a very terrible ceremony, is it? Did you expect prostrations at the altar; and blindfold gropings, and the blessing of the dagger? When you come to know a little more of our organization, of its extent and its power, you will understand how we can afford to dispense with all those theatrical ways of frightening people into obedience and secrecy."

"I expected to find Evelyn here," said George Brand. He was in truth, just a little bit bewildered as yet. He had been assured that there would be no foolish mummeries or fantastic rites of initiation; but all the same he had been much occupied with this step he was about to take; he had been thinking of it much; he had been looking forward to something unknown; and he had been nerving himself to encounter whatever might come before him. But that five minutes of silence; the quick reading and signing of a paper; the sudden dispersion of the small assemblage: he could scarcely believe it was all real.

"No," Lind said, "Lord Evelyn is not yet an officer. He is only a Companion in the third degree, like yourself."

"A what?"

"A Companion in the third degree. Surely you read the document that you signed?"

It was still lying on the table before him. He took it up; yes, he certainly was so designated there. Yet he could not remember seeing the phrase, though he had, before signing, read every word twice over.

"And now, Mr. Brand," his companion said, seating himself at the other side of the table, "when you have got over your surprise that there should be no ceremony, it will become my duty to give you some idea—some rough idea—of the mechanism and aims of our association, and to show you in what measure we are allied with other societies. The details you will become acquainted with by-and-by; that will be a labor of time. And you know, of course, or you have guessed, that there are no mysteries to be revealed to you, no profound religious truths to be communicated, no dogmas to be accepted. I am afraid we are very degenerate descendants of the Mystics, and the Illuminati, and all the rest of them; we have become prosaic; our wants are sadly material. And yet we have our dreams and aspirations, too; and the virtues that we exact—obedience, temperance, faith, self-sacrifice—are not ignoble. Meanwhile, to begin. I think you may prepare yourself to be astonished."

But astonishment was no word for the emotion experienced by the newly admitted member when Ferdinand Lind proceeded to give him, with careful facts and sober computations, some rough outline of the extent and power of this intricate and far-reaching organization. Hitherto the word "International" had with him been associated with the ridiculous fiasco at Geneva; but here was something, not calling itself international, which aimed at nothing less than knitting together the multitudes of the nations, not only in Europe, but in the English and French and German speaking territories beyond the seas, in a solemn league—a league for self-protection and mutual understanding, for the preservation of international peace, the spread of knowledge, the outbraving of tyranny, the defiance of religious intolerance, the relief of the oppressed, the help of the poor, and the sick, and the weak. This was no cutthroat conspiracy or wild scheme of confiscation and plunder; but a design for the establishment of wide and beneficent law—a law which should protect, not the ambition of kings, not the pride of armies, not the revenues of

priests, but the rights and the liberties of those who were "darkening in labor and pain." And this message, that could go forth alike to the Camorristi and the Nihilists ; to the Free Masons and the Good Templars ; to the Trades-unionists and the Knights of Labor—to all those masses of men moved by the spirit of co-operation—"See, brothers, what we have to show you. Some of you are aiming at chaos and perdition ; others putting wages as their god and sovereign ; others content with a vague philanthropy almost barren of results. This is all the help we want of you—to pledge yourselves to associate with us, to accept our modest programme of actual needs, to give help to those who are in want or trouble, to promise that you will stand by us in the time to come. And when the time does come ; when we are combined ; when knowledge is abroad, and mutual trust, who will say 'yes' if the voice of the people in every nation murmurs 'No?' What priest will reimpose the Inquisition on us ; what king drive us to shed blood that his robes may have the richer dye ; what policeman in high places endeavor to stamp out our God-given right of free speech ? It is so little for you to grant ; it is so much for you, and for us, to gain !"

These were not the words he uttered—for Lind spoke English slowly and carefully—but they were the spirit of his words. And as he went on describing to this new member what had already been done, what was being done, and the great possibilities of the future, Brand began to wonder whether all this gigantic scheme, with its simple, bold, and practical outlines, were the work of this one man. He ventured by-and-by to hint at some such question.

"Mine?" Lind said, frankly, "Ah no! not the inspiration of it. I am only the mechanic putting brick and brick together ; the design is not mine, nor that of any one man. It is an aggregate project—a speculation occupying many a long hour of imprisonment—a scheme to be handed from one to the other, with alterations and suggestions."

"But even your share of it—how can one man control so much?" Brand said ; for he easily perceived what a mass of detail had to pass through this man's hands.

"I will tell you," said the other. "Because every stone added to the building is placed there for good. There is no looking back. There are no pacifications of revolt. No questions ; but absolute obedience. You see, we exact so little : why should any one rebel ? However, you will learn more and more as you go on ; and soon your work will be appointed you. Meanwhile, I thank you, brother."

Lind rose and shook his hand.

"Now," said he, "that is enough of business. It occurred to me this morning that, if you had nothing else to do this evening, you might come and dine with us, and give Natalie the chance of meeting you in your new character."

"I shall be most pleased," said Brand; and his face flushed.

"I telegraphed to Evelyn. If he is in town, perhaps he will join us. Shall we walk home?"

"If you like."

So they went out together into the glare and clamor of the streets. George Brand's heart was very full with various emotions; but, not to lose altogether his English character, he preserved a somewhat critical tone as he talked.

"Well, Mr. Lind," he said, "so far as I can see and hear, your scheme has been framed not only with great ability, but also with a studied moderation and wisdom. The only point I would urge is this—that, in England, as little as possible should be said about kings and priests. A great deal of what you said would scarcely be understood here. You see, in England it is not the Crown nowadays which instigate or insists on war; it is Parliament and the people. Dynastic ambitions do not trouble us. There is no reason whatever why we here should hate kings when they are harmless."

"You are right; the case is different," Lind admitted.

"But that makes adhesion to our programme all the easier."

"I was only speaking of the police of mentioning things which might alarm timid people. Then as for the priests; it may be the interest of the priests in Ireland to keep the peasantry ignorant; but it is certainly not so in England. The Church of England fosters education—"

"Are not your clergymen the bitterest enemies of the School Board schools?"

"Well, they may dislike seeing education dissociated from religion—that is natural, considering what they believe; but they are not necessary enemies of education. Perhaps I am a very young member to think of making such a suggestion. But the truth is, that when an ordinary Englishman hears anything said against kings and priests, he merely thinks of kings and priests as he knows them—and as being mostly harmless creatures nowadays—and concludes that you are a Communist wanting to overturn society altogether."

"Precisely so. I told Natalie this morning that if she were to be allowed to join our association her English friends would imagine her to be a *petroleuse*."

"Miss Lind is not in the association?" Brand said, quickly.

"As yet no women have been admitted. It is a difficulty; for in some societies with which we are partly in alliance women are members. Ah, such noble creatures many of them are, too! However, the question may come forward by-and-by. In the mean time, Natalie, without being made aware of what we are actually doing—that, of course, is forbidden—knows something of what our work must be, and is warm in her sympathy. She is a good help, too: she is the quickest translator we have got."

"Do you think," Brand said, somewhat timidly, but with a frown on his face, "that it is fair to put such tedious labor on the shoulders of a young girl? Surely there are enough of men to do the work?"

"You shall propose that to her yourself," Lind said laughing.

Well, they arrived at the house in Curzon Street, and, when they went up-stairs to the drawing-room, they found Lord Evelyn there. Natalie Lind came forward—with less than usual of her graciously self-possessed manner—and shook hands with him briefly, and said, with averted look,

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Brand."

Now, as her eyes were cast down, it was impossible that she could have noticed the quick expression of disappointment that crossed his face. Was it that she herself was instantly conscious of the coldness of her greeting, and anxious to atone for that? Was it that she plucked up heart of grace? At all events, she suddenly offered him both her hands with a frank courage; she looked him in the face with the soft, tender, serious eyes; and then, before she turned away, the low voice said,

"Brother, I welcome you!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SOUTHWARD.

AFTER a late, cold, and gloomy spring, a glimpse of early summer shone over the land; and after a long period of anxious and oftentimes irritating and disappointing travail—in wet and dismal towns, in comfortless inns, with associates not always to his liking—George Brand was hurrying to the

South. Ah, the thought of it, as the train whirled along on this sunlit morning! After the darkness, the light; after fighting, peace; after the task-work, a smile of reward! No more than that was his hope; but it was a hope that kept his heart afire and glad on many a lonely night.

At length his companion, who had slept steadily on ever since they had entered the train at Carlisle, at about one in the morning, awoke, rubbed his eyes, and glanced at the window.

"We are going to have a fine day at last, Humphreys," said Brand.

"They have been having better weather in the South, sir."

The man looked like a well-dressed mechanic. He had an intelligent face, keen and hard. He spoke with the Newcastle burr.

"I wish you would not call me 'sir,'" Brand said, impatiently.

"It comes natural, somehow, sir," said the other, with great simplicity. "There is not a man in any part of the country, but would say 'sir' to one of the Brands of Darlington. When Mr. Lind telegraphed to me you were coming down, I telegraphed back, 'Is he one of the Brands of Darlington?' and when I got his answer I said to myself, 'Here is the man to go to the Political Committee of the Trades-union Congress: they won't fight shy of him.'"

"Well, we have no great cause to grumble at what has been done in that direction; but that infernal *Internationale* is doing a deal of mischief. There is not a trades-unionist in the country who does not know what is going on in France. A handful of irresponsible madmen trying to tack themselves on to the workmen's association—well, surely the men will have more sense than to listen. The *congres ouvrier* to change its name, and to become the *congres revolutionnaire*! When I first went to Jackson, Molyneux, and the others, I found they had a sort of suspicion that we wanted to make Communists of them and tear society to pieces."

"You have done more in a couple of months, sir, than we all have done in the last ten years," his companion said.

"That is impossible. Look at—"

He named some names, certain of them well known enough. The other shook his head.

"Where we have been they don't believe in London professors, and speech-makers, and chaps like that. They know that the North is the backbone and the brain of England,

and in the North they want to be spoken to by a North-countryman."

"I am a Buckinghamshire man."

"That may be where you live, sir; but you are one of the Brands of Darlington," said the other, doggedly.

By-and-by they entered the huge, resounding station.

"What are you going to do to-night, Humphreys? Come and have some dinner with me, and we will look in afterward at the Century."

Humphreys looked embarrassed for a moment.

"I was thinking of going to the Coger's Hall, sir," said he, hitting upon an excuse. "I have heard some good speaking there."

"Mostly bunkum, isn't it?"

"No, sir."

"All right. Then I shall see you to-morrow morning in Lisle Street. Good-bye."

He jumped into a hansom, and was presently rattling away through the busy streets. How sweet and fresh was the air, even here in the midst of the misty and golden city! The early summer was abroad; there was a flush of green on the trees in the squares. When he got down to the Embankment, he was quite surprised by the beauty of the gardens; there were not many gardens in the towns he had chiefly been living in.

He dashed up the narrow wooden stairs.

"Look alive now, Waters: get my bath ready."

"It is ready, sir."

"And breakfast!"

"Whenever you please, sir."

He took off his dust-smothered travelling-coat, and was about to fling it on the couch, when he saw lying there two pieces of some brilliant stuff that were strange to him.

"What are these things?"

"They were left, sir, by Mr. —, of Bond Street, on approval. He will call this afternoon."

"Tell him to go to the devil!" said Brand, briefly, as he walked off into his bedroom.

Presently he came back.

"Stay a bit," said he; and he took up the two long strips of silk-embroidered stuff—Florentine work, probably, of about the end of the sixteenth century. The ground was a delicate yellowish-gray, with an initial letter worked in various colors over it. Mr. —, of Bond Street, knew that Brand had often amused his idle hours abroad in picking up things like

this, chiefly as presents to lady friends, and no doubt thought they would be welcome enough, even for bachelors' rooms.

"Tell him I will take them."

"But the price, sir?"

"Ask him his price; beat him down; and keep the difference."

After bath and breakfast there was an enormous pile of correspondence awaiting him; for not a single letter referring to his own affairs had been forwarded to him for over two months. He had thrown his entire time and care into his work in the North. And now that these arrears had to be cleared off, he attacked the business with an obvious impatience. Formerly he had been used to dawdle over his letters, getting through a good portion of the forenoon with them and conversations with Waters about Buckinghamshire news. Now, even with that omniscient factotum by his side, his progress was slow, simply because he was hurried. He made dives here and there, without system, without settlement. At last, looking at his watch, he jumped up: it was half-past eleven.

"Some other time, Waters—some other time; the man must wait," he said to the astonished but patient person beside him. "If Lord Evelyn calls, tell him I shall look in at the *Century* to-night."

"Yes, sir."

Some half-hour thereafter he was standing in Park Lane, his heart beating somewhat quickly, his eyes fixed eagerly on two figures that were crossing the thoroughfare lower down to one of the gates leading into Hyde Park. These were Natalie Lind and the little Anneli. He had known that he would see her thus; he had imagined the scene a thousand times; he had pictured to himself every detail—the trees, the tall railings, the spring flowers in the plots, and the little rosy-cheeked German girl walking by her mistress's side; and yet, now that this familiar thing had come true, he trembled to behold it; he breathed quickly; he could not go forward to her and hold out his hand. Slowly, for they were walking slowly, he went along to the gate and entered after them; cautiously, lest she should turn suddenly and confront him with her eyes; drawn, and yet fearing to follow. She was talking with some animation to her companion; though even in this profound silence he could not hear the sound of her voice. But he could see the beautiful oval of her face! and sometimes, when she turned with a laugh to the little Anneli, he caught a glimpse of the black eyes and eyelashes, the smiling

lips and brilliant teeth ; and once or twice she put out the palm of her right hand with a little gesture which, despite her English dress, would have told a stranger that she was of foreign ways. But the look of welcome, the smile of reward that he had been looking forward to ?

Well, Mr. Lind was in America ; and during his absence his daughter saw but few visitors. There was no particular reason why, supposing that George Brand met Natalie in the street, he should not go up and shake hands with her ; and many a time, in these mental pictures of his of her morning walk with the rosy-cheeked Anneli, he imagined himself confronting her under the shadow of the trees, and perhaps walking some way with her, to listen once more to the clear, low vibrations of her musical voice. But no sooner had he seen her come into Park Lane—the vision became real—than he felt he could not go up and speak to her. If he had met her by accident, perhaps he might ; but to watch her, to entrap her, to break in on her wished-for isolation under false pretences—all that he suddenly felt to be impossible. He could follow her with his heart ; but the sound of her voice, the touch of her hand, the smile of her calm, beautiful, dark eyes, were as remote for him as if she, too, were beyond the broad Atlantic.

He was not much given to introspection and analysis ; during the past two months more especially he had been far too busy to be perpetually asking “Why ? why ?”—the vice of indolence. It was enough that, in the cold and the wet, there was a fire in his heart that kept him glad with thinking of the fair days to come ; and that, in the foggy afternoons or the lonely nights when he was alone, and perhaps despondent or impatient over the stupidity or the contumacy he had had to encounter, there came to him the soft murmur of a voice from far away—proud, sad, and yet full of consolation and hope :

“ —But ye that might be clothed with all things pleasant,
Ye are foolish that put off the fair soft present,
That clothe yourself with the cold future air ;
When mother and father, and tender sister and brother,
And the old live love that was shall be as ye,
Dust and no fruit of loving life shall be.
—She shall be yet who is more than all these were,
Than sister or wife or father unto us, or mother.”

He could hear her voice ; he could see the beautiful face grow pale with its proud fervor ; he could feel the soft touch

of her hand when she came forward and said, "Brother, I welcome you!"

And now that she was there before him, the gladness in his heart at the mere sight of her was troubled with a trembling fear and pain. She was but a stone's-throw in front of him; but she seemed far away. The world was young around her; and she belonged to the time of youth and of hope; life, that he had been ready to give up as a useless and aimless thing, was only opening out before her, full of a thousand beauties, and wonders, and possibilities. If only he could have taken her hand, and looked into her eyes, and claimed that smile of welcome, he would have been nearer to her. Surely, in one thing at least they were in sympathy. There was a bond between them. If the past had divided them, the future would bring them more together. Did not the Pilgrims go by in bands, until death struck down its victims here and there?

Natalie knew nothing of all this vague longing, and doubt, and pain in the breast of one who was so near her. She was in a gay mood. The morning was beautiful; the soft wind after the rain brought whiffs of scent from the distant rose-red hawthorn. Though she was here under shadow of the trees, the sun beyond shone on the fresh and moist grass; and at the end of the glades there were glimpses of brilliant color in the foliage—the glow of the laburnum, the lilac blaze of the rhododendron bushes. And how still the place was! Far off there was a dull roar of carriages in Piccadilly; but here there was nothing but the bleating of the sheep, the chirp of the young birds, the stir of the wind among the elms. Sometimes he could now catch the sound of her voice.

She was in a gay humor. When she got to the Serpentine—the north bank was her favorite promenade; she could see on the other side, just below the line of leaves, the people passing and repassing on horseback; but she was not of them—she found a number of urchins wading. They had no boat; but they had the bung of a barrel, which served, and that they were pushing through the water with twigs and sticks; their shapeless boots they had left on the bank. Now, as it seemed to Brand, who was watching from a distance, she planned a scheme. Anneli was seen to go ahead of the boys, and speak to them. Their attention being thus distracted, the young mistress stepped rapidly down to the tattered boots, and dropped something in each. Then she withdrew, and was rejoined by her maid; they walked away without waiting to see the result of their machinations. But

George Brand, following by-and-by, heard one of the urchins call out with wonder that he had found a penny in his shoe ; and this extraordinary piece of news brought back his comrades, who rather mechanically began to examine their foot-gear too. And then the amazement !—and the looks around !—and the examination of the pence, lest that treasure should vanish away ! Brand went up to them.

“Look hear you young stupids ; don’t you see that tall lady away along there by the boat-house—why don’t you go and thank her ?”

But they were either too shy or too incredulous ; so he left them. He did not forget the incident.

Perhaps it was that the heavens had grown dark in the southwest, threatening a shower ; but, at all events, Natalie soon returned and set out on her homeward way, giving this unknown spy some trouble to escape observation. But when she had passed, he again followed, now with even greater unrest and pain at his heart. For would not she soon disappear, and the outer world grow empty, and the dull hours have to be faced ? He had come to London with such hope and gladness ; now the very sunlight was to be taken out of his life by the shutting of a door in Curzon Street.

Fate, however, was kinder to him than he had dared to hope. As Natalie was returning home, he ventured to draw a little nearer to her, but still with the greatest caution, for he would have been overcome with shame if she had detected him dogging her footsteps in this aimless, if innocent manner. And now that she had got close to her own door, he had drawn nearer still—on the other side of the street ; he so longed to catch one more glimpse of the dark eyes smiling, and the mobile, proud mouth. But just as the door was being opened from within, a man who had evidently been watching his chance thrust himself before the two women, barring their way, and proceeded to address Natalie in a vehement, gesticulating fashion, with much clinching of his fists and throwing out of his arms. Anneli had shrunk back a step, for the man was uncouth and unkempt ; but the young mistress stood erect and firm, confronting the beggar, or madman, or whoever he was, without the slightest sign of fear.

This was enough for George Brand. He was not thrusting himself unfairly on her seclusion if he interposed to protect her from menace. Instantly he crossed the road.

“Who are you ? What do you want ?” This was what he said ; but what he did was to drive the man back a couple of yards.

A hand was laid on his arm quickly.

"He is in trouble," Natalie said, calmly. "He wants to see papa; he has come a long way; he does not understand that papa is in America. If you could only convince him—But you do not talk Russian."

"I can talk English," said Brand, regarding the maniac-looking person before him with angry brows. "Will you go indoors, Miss Lind, and leave him to me. I will talk an English to him that he will understand."

"Is that the way you answer an appeal for help?" said she, with gentle reproof. "The man is in trouble. If I persuade him to go with you, will you take him to papa's chambers? Either Beratinsky, or Heinrich Reitzei will be there."

"Reitzei is there."

"He will hear what this man has to say. Will you be so kind?"

"I will do anything to rid you of this fellow, who looks more like a madman than a beggar."

She stepped forward and spoke to the man again—her voice sounded gentle and persuasive to Brand, in this tongue which he could not understand. When she had finished, the uncouth person in the tattered garments dropped on both knees on the pavement, and took her hand in his, and kissed it in passionate gratitude. Then he rose, and stood with his cap in his hand.

"He will go with you. I am so sorry to trouble you, Mr. Brand; and I have not even said, 'How do you do?'"

To hear this beautiful voice after so long a silence—to find those calm, dark, friendly eyes regarding him—bewildered him, or gave him courage, he knew not which. He said to her, with a quick flush on his forehead,

"May I come back to tell you how I succeed?"

She only hesitated for a second.

"If you have time. If you care to take the trouble."

He carried away with him the look of her face—that filled his heart with sunlight. In the hansom, into which he bundled his unkempt companion, if only he had known enough Russian, he would have expressed gratitude to him. Beggar or maniac, or whatever he was, had he not been the means of procuring for George Brand that long-coveted, long-dreamed-of smile of welcome?

CHAPTER XIV.

A RUSSIAN EPISODE.

"Is that the way you answer an appeal for help?" With that gentle protest still lingering in his ear, he was not inclined to be hard on this unfortunate wretch who was in the cab with him; and yet at the same time he was resolved to prevent any repetition of the scene he had just witnessed. At the last he discovered that the man had picked up in his wanderings a little German. His own German was not first-rate; it was fluent, forcible, and accurate enough, so far as hotels and railway-stations were concerned; elsewhere it had a tendency to halt, blunder, and double back on itself. But, at all events, he managed to convey to his companion the distinct intimation that any further troubling of that young lady would only procure for him a broken head.

The dull, stupid, savage-looking face betrayed no sign of intelligence. He repeated the warning again and again; and at last, at the phrase "that young lady," the dazed small eyes lit up somewhat, and the man clasped his hands.

"Ein Engel!" he said, apparently to himself. "Ein Engel—ein Engel! Ach Gott—wie schon—wie gemuthlich!"

"Yes, yes, yes," Brand said, "that is all very well; but one is not permitted to annoy angels—to trouble them in the street. Do you understand that that means punishment—one must be punished—if one returns to the house of that young lady? Do you understand?"

The man regarded him with the small, deep-set eyes again sunk into apathy.

"Ihr Diener, Herr," said he, submissively.

"You understand you are not to go back to the house of the young lady?"

"Ihr Diener, Herr."

There was nothing to be got out of him, or into him; so Brand waited until he should get help of Heidrich Reitzei, Lind's *locum tenens*.

Reitzei was in the chambers—at Lind's table, in fact. He was a man of about twenty-eight or thirty, slim and dark, with a perfectly pallid face, a small black mustache carefully waxed, and an affectedly courteous smile. He wore a *pince-nez*; was fond of slang, to show his familiarity with English; and aimed at an English manner, too. He seemed bored.

He regarded this man whom Brand introduced to him without surprise, with indifference.

"Hear what this fellow has to say," Brand said, "will you? and give him distinctly to understand that if he tries again to see Miss Lind, I will break his head for him. What idiot could have given him Lind's private address?"

The man was standing near the door, stolid apparently, but with his small eyes keenly watching. Reitzei said a word or two to him. Instantly he went—he almost sprung—forward; and this movement was so unexpected that the equanimity of the pallid young man received a visible shock, and he hastily drew out a drawer a few inches. Brand caught sight of the handle of a revolver.

But the man was only eager to tell his story, and presently Reitzei had resumed his air of indifference. As he proceeded to translate for Brand's benefit, in interjectional phrases, what this man with the trembling hands and the burning eyes was saying, it was strange to mark the contrast between the two men.

"His name Kirski," the younger man was saying, as he eyed, with a cool and critical air, the wild look in the other's face. "A carver in wood, but cannot work now, for his hands tremble, through hunger and fatigue—through drink, I should say—native of a small village in Kiev—had his share of the Communal land—but got permission from the Commune to spend part of the year in Kiev itself—sent back all his taxes duly, and money too, because—oh, this is it?—daughter of village Elder—young, beautiful, of course—left an orphan, with three brothers—and their share of the land too much for them. Ah, this is the story, then, my friend? Married, too—young, beautiful, good—yes, yes, we know all that—"

There were tears running down the face of the other man. But these he shook away; and a wilder light than ever came into his eyes.

"He goes to Kiev as usual, foolish fellow; now I see what all the row is about. When he returns, three months after, he goes to his house. Empty. The neighbors will not speak. At last one says something about Pavel Michaieloff, the great proprietor, whose house and farm are some versts away—my good fellow, you have got the palsy, or is it drink?—he goes and seeks out the house of Pavel—yes, yes, the story is not new—Pavel is at the open window, smoking—he goes up to the window—there is a woman inside—when she sees him

she utters a loud scream, and rushes for protection to the man Michaieloff—then all the fat is in the fire naturally—”

The Russian choked and gasped; drops of perspiration stood on his forehead; he looked wildly around.

“Water?” said Reitzei. “Poor devil, you need some water to cool down your excitement. You are making as much fuss as if that kind of thing had never happened in the world before.”

But he rose and got him some water, which the man drained eagerly; then he continued his story with the same fierce and angry vehemence.

“Well, yes, he had something to complain of, certainly,” Reitzei said, translating all that incoherent passion into cool little phrases. “Not a fair fight. Pavel summons his men from the court-yard—men with whips—dogs, too—he is lashed and driven along the roads, and the dogs tear at him! Oh yes, my good friend, you have been badly used; but you have come a long way to tell your story. I must ask him how the mischief he got here at all.”

But here Reitzei paused and stared. Something the man said—in an eager, low voice, with his sunken small eyes all afire—startled him out of his critical air.

“Oh, that is it, is it?” he said, eyeing him. “He will do any thing for us—he will commit a murder—ten murders—if only we give him money, a knife, and help to kill the man Michaieloff. Well, he is a lively sort of person to let loose on society.”

“The man is clearly mad,” Brand said.

“The man was madder who sent him to us,” Reitzei answered. “I should not like to be in his shoes if Lind hears that this maniac was allowed to see his daughter.”

The wretched creature standing there glanced eagerly from one to the other, with the eyes of a wild animal, seeking to gather something from their looks; then he went forward to the table, and stooped down and spoke to Reitzei still further, in the same low, fierce voice, his whole frame meanwhile shaking with his excitement. Reitzei said something to him in reply, and motioned him back. He retired a step or two, and then kept watching the faces of the two men.

“What are you going to do with him?” Brand said.

Reitzei shrugged his shoulders.

“I know what I should like to do with him if I dared,” he said, with a graceful smile. “There is a friend of mine not a hundred miles away from that very Kiev who wants a little admonition. Her name is Petrovna, she is the jail-

matron of a female penitentiary; she is just a little too fierce at times. Murderers, thieves, prostitutes: oh yes, she can be civil enough to them; but let a political prisoner come near her—one of her own sex, mind—and she becomes a devil, a tigress, a vampire. Ah, Madame Petrovna and I may have a little reckoning some day. I have asked Lind again and again to petition for a decree against her; but no, he will not move; he is becoming Anglicized, effeminate."

"A decree?" Brand said.

The other smiled, with an affectation of calm superiority.

"You will learn by-and-by. Meanwhile, if I dared, what I should like to do would be to give our friend here plenty of money, and not one but two knives, saying to him, 'My good friend, here is one knife for Michaieloff, if you like; but first of all here is this knife for that angel in disguise, Madame Petrovna, of the Female Penitentiary in Novolevsk. Strike sure and hard!'"

For one instant his affectation forsook him, and there was a gleam in his eyes. This was but a momentary relapse from his professed indifference.

"Well, Mr. Brand, I suppose I must take over this madman from you. You may tell Miss Lind she need not be frightened."

"I should not think Miss Lind was in the habit of being frightened," said Brand, coldly.

"Ah, no; doubtless not. Well, I shall see that this fellow does not trouble her again. What fine tidings we had of your work in the North! You have been a power; you have moved mountains."

"I have moved John Molyneux," said Brand, with a laugh, "and in these days that is a more difficult business."

"Fine news from Spain, too," said Reitzei, glancing at some letters. "From Valladolid, Barcelona, Ferrol, Saragossa—all the same story: coalition, coalition. Salmero will be in London next week."

"But you have not told me what you are going to do with this man yet; you must stow the combustible piece of goods somewhere. Poor devil, his sufferings have made a pitiable object of him."

"My dear friend," said Reitzei, "You don't suppose that a Russian peasant would feel so deeply a beating with whips, or the worrying of dogs, or even the loss of his wife? Of course, all together, it was something of a hard grind. He must have been constitutionally insane, and that woke the whole thing up."

"Then he should be confined. He is a lunatic at large."

"I don't think he would harm anybody," Reitzei said, regarding the man as if he were a strange animal. "I would not shut up a dog in a lunatic asylum; I would rather put a bullet through his head. And this fellow—if we could humbug him a little, and get him to his work again—I know a man in Wardour Street who would do that for me—and see what effect the amassing of a little English money might have on him. Better a miser than a wild beast. And he seems a submissive sort of creature. Leave him to me, Mr. Brand."

Brand began to think a little better of Reitzei, whom hitherto he had rather disliked. He handed him five pounds, to get some clothes and tools for the man, who, when he was told of this generosity, turned to Brand and said something to him in Russian which set Reitzei laughing.

"What is it he says?"

"He said, 'Little Father, you are worthy to become the husband of the angel: may the day come soon!' I suppose the angel is Miss Lind; she must have been very kind to the man."

"She only spoke to him; but her voice can be kind," said Brand, rather absently, and then he left.

Away went the hansom back to Curzon Street. He said to himself that it was not for nothing that this unfortunate wretch Kirski had wandered all the way from the Dnieper to the Thames. He would look after this man. He would do something for him. Five pounds only? And he had been the means of securing this interview, if only for three or four minutes; after the long period of labor and hope and waiting he might have gone without a word at all but for this overtroubled poor devil.

And now—now he might even see her alone for a couple of minutes in the hushed little drawing-room; and she might say if she had heard about what had been done in the North, and about his eagerness to return to the work. One look of thanks; that was enough. Sometimes, by himself up there in the solitary inns, the old fit had come over him; and he had laughed at himself, and wondered at this new fire of occupation and interest that was blazing through his life, and asked himself, as of old, to what end—to what end? But when he heard Natalie Lind's voice, there was a quick good-bye to all questioning. One look at the calm, earnest eyes, and he drank deep of faith, courage, devotion. And surely this story of the man Kirski—what he could tell her of it—would be sufficient to fill up five minutes, eight minutes, ten minutes, while

all the time he should be able to dwell on her eyes, whether they were downcast, or turned to his with their frank, soft glance. He should be in the perfume of the small drawing-room. He would see the Roman necklace Mazzini had given her gleam on her bosom as she breathed.

He did not know what Natalie Lind had been about during his absence.

"Anneli, Anneli—hither, child!" she called in German. "Run up to Madame Potecki, and ask her to come and spend the afternoon with me. She must come at once, to lunch with me; I will wait."

"Yes, Fraulein. What music, Fraulein?"

"None; never mind any music. But she must come at once."

"Schon, Fraulein," said the little Anneli, about to depart.

Her young mistress called her back, and paused, with a little hesitation.

"You may tell Elizabeth," said she, with an indifferent air, "that it is possible—it is quite possible—it is at least possible—I may have two friends to lunch with me; and she must send at once if she wants anything more. And you could bring me back some fresh flowers, Anneli?"

"Why not, Fraulein?"

"Go quick, then, Anneli—fly like a roe—*durch Wald und auf der Haide!*"

And so it came about that when George Brand was ushered into the scented little drawing-room—so anxious to make the most of the invaluable minutes—he found himself introduced first of all to Madame Potecki, a voluble, energetic little Polish gentlewoman, whose husband had been killed in the Warsaw disturbances of '61, and who now supported herself in London by teaching music. She was eager to know all about the man Kirski, and hoped that he was not wholly a maniac, and trusted that Mr. Brand would see that her dear child—her adopted daughter, she might say—was not terrified again by the madman.

"My dear madame," said Brand, "you must not imagine that it was from terror that Miss Lind handed over the man to me—it was from kindness. That is more natural to her than terror."

"Ah, I know the dear child has the courage of an army," said the little old lady, tapping her adopted daughter on the shoulder with the fan. "But she must take care of herself while her papa is away in America."

Natalie rose; and of course Brand rose also, with a sudden

qualm of disappointment, for he took that as the signal of his dismissal ; and he had scarcely spoken a word to her.

"Mr. Brand," said she, with some little trifle of embarrassment, "I know I must have deprived you of your luncheon. It was so kind of you to go at once with the poor man. Would it save you time—if you are not going anywhere—I thought perhaps you might come and have something with madame and myself. You must be dying of hunger."

He did not refuse the invitation. And behold ! when he went down-stairs, the table was already laid for three ; had he been expected, he asked himself ? Those flowers there, too : he knew it was no maid-servant's fingers that had arranged and distributed them so skilfully.

How he blessed this little Polish lady, and her volubility, and her extravagant, subtle, honest flattery of her dear adopted daughter ! It gave him liberty to steep himself in the rich consciousness of Natalie's presence ; he could listen in silence for the sound of her voice—he could covertly watch the beauty of her shapely hands—without being considered pre-occupied or morose. All he had to do was to say, "Yes, madame," or "Indeed, madame," the while he knew that Natalie Lind was breathing the same air with him—that at any moment the large, lustrous dark eyes might look up and meet his. And she spoke little, too ; and had scarcely her usual frank self-confidence : perhaps a chance reference of Madame Potecki to the fact that her adopted daughter had been brought up without a mother had somewhat saddened her.

The room was shaded in a measure, for the French silk blinds were down ; but there was a soft golden glow prevailing all the same. For many a day George Brand remembered that little luncheon-party ; the dull, bronze glow of the room ; the flowers ; the soft, downcast eyes opposite him ; the bright, pleasant garrulity of the little Polish lady ; and always—ah, the delight of it !—that strange, trembling, sweet consciousness that Natalie Lind was listening as he listened—that almost he could have heard the beating of her heart.

And a hundred and a hundred times he swore that, whoever throughout the laboring and suffering world might regret that day, the man Kirski should not.

CHAPTER XV.

NEW FRIENDS.

It was a Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park, in this pleasantly opening summer ; and there was a fair show of "the quality" come out for their accustomed promenade, despite the few thunder-showers that had swept across from the South. These, in fact, had but served to lay the dust, and to bring out the scent of the hawthorns and lilacs, so that the air was sweet with perfume ; while the massive clouds, banking up in the North, formed a purple background to show up the young green foliage of the trees, all wet with rain, and shimmering tremulously in the sunlight.

George Brand and his friend Evelyn sat in the back row of chairs, watching the people pass and repass. It was a sombre procession, but that here and there appeared a young English girl in her pale spring costume—paler than the fresh glow of youth and health on her face, and that here and there the sunlight, wandering down through the branches, touched a scarlet sunshade—just then coming into fashion—until that shone like a beautiful spacious flower among the mass of green.

When they had been silently watching the people for some little time, Brand said, almost to himself,

"How very unlike those women she is !"

"Who? Oh, Natalie Lind," said the other, who had been speaking of her some minutes before. "Well, that is natural and I don't say it to their disadvantage. I believe most girls are well-intended enough ; but, of course, they grow up in a particular social atmosphere, and it depends on that what they become. If it is rather fast, the girl sees nothing objectionable in being fast too. If it is religious, the god of her idolatry is a bishop. If it is sporting, she thinks mostly about horses. Natalie is exceptional, because she has been brought up in exceptional circumstances. For one thing, she has been a good deal alone ; and she has formed all sorts of beautiful idealisms and aspirations—"

The conversation dropped here ; for at the moment Lord Evelyn espied two of his sisters coming along in the slow procession.

"Here come two of the girls," he said to his friend. "How precious demure they look !"

Brand at once rose, and went out from the shadow of the trees, to pay his respects to the two young ladies.

"How do you do, Miss D'Agincourt? How do you do, Miss Frances?"

Certainly no one would have suspected these two very graceful and pleasant-looking girls of being madcap creatures at home. The elder was a tall and slightly-built blonde, with large gray eyes set wide apart; the younger a gentle little thing, with brownish eyes, freckles, and a pretty mouth.

"Mamma?" said the eldest daughter, in answer to his inquiries. "Oh, she is behind, bringing up the rear, as it were. We have to go in detachment, or else the police would come and read the riot act against us. Francie and I are the vanguard; and she feels such a good little girl, marching along two and two, just as if she were back at Brighton."

The clear gray eyes—quite demure—glanced in toward the shadows of the trees.

"I see you have got Evelyn there, Mr. Brand. Who is the extraordinary person he is always talking about now—the Maid of Saragossa, or Joan of Arc, or something like that? Do you know her?"

"I suppose you mean Miss Lind."

"I know he has persuaded mamma to go and call on her, and get her to dine with us, if she will come. Now, I call that kind."

"If she accepts, you mean?"

"No, I mean nothing of the sort. Good-bye. If we stay another minute, we shall have the middle detachments overlapping the vanguard. *En avant, Francie! Vorwärts!*"

She bowed to him, and passed on in her grave and stately manner: more calmly observant, demurer eyes were not in the Park.

He ran the gauntlet of the whole family, and at last encountered the mamma, who brought up the rear with the youngest of her daughters. Lady Evelyn was a tall, somewhat good-looking, elderly lady, who wore her silver-white hair in old-fashioned curls. She was an amiable but strictly matter-of-fact person, who beheld her daughters' mad humors with surprise as well as alarm. What were they forever laughing at? Besides, it was indecorous. She had not conducted herself in that manner when she lived in her father's home.

Lady Evelyn, who was vaguely aware that Brand knew the Linds, repeated her daughter's information about the proposed visit, and said that if Miss Lind would come and spend the evening with them, she hoped Mr. Brand would come too.

"These girls do tease dreadfully, I know," said their mamma; "but perhaps they will behave a little better before a stranger."

Mr. Brand replied that he hoped Miss Lind would accept the invitation—for during her father's absence she must be somewhat dull—but that even without the protection of her presence he was not afraid to face those formidable young ladies. Whereupon Miss Geraldine—who was generally called the baby, though she was turned thirteen—glanced at him with a look which said, "Won't you catch it for that!" and the mamma then bade him good-bye, saying that Rosalys would write to him as soon as the evening was arranged.

He had not long to wait for that expected note. The very next night he received it. Miss Lind was coming on Thursday; would that suit him? A quarter to eight.

He was there punctual to the moment. The presence of the whole rabble of girls in the drawing-room told him that this was to be a quite private and domestic dinner-party; on other occasions only two or three of the phalanx—as Miss D'Agincourt described herself and her sisters—were chosen to appear. And, on this especial occasion, there was a fine hubbub of questions and raillery going on—which Brand vainly endeavored to meet all at once—when he was suddenly rescued. The door was opened, and Miss Lind was announced. The clamor ceased.

She was dressed in black, with a red camellia in her bosom, and another in the magnificent black hair. Brand thought he had never seen her look so beautiful, and at once so graciously proud and gentle. Lady Evelyn went forward to meet her, and greeted her very kindly indeed. She was introduced to one or two of the girls. She shook hands with Mr. Brand, and gave him a pleasant smile of greeting. Lady Evelyn had to apologize for her son's absence; he had only gone to write a note.

The tall, beautiful Hungarian girl seemed not in the least embarrassed by all these curious eyes, that occasionally and covertly regarded her while pretending not to do so. Two of the young ladies there were older than she was, yet she seemed more of a woman than any of them. Her self-possession was perfect. She sat down by Lady Evelyn, and submitted to be questioned. The girls afterward told their brother they believed she was an actress, because of the clever manner in which she managed her train.

But at this moment Lord Evelyn made his appearance in great excitement, and with profuse apologies.

"But the fact is," said he, producing an evening paper, "the fact is—just listen to this, Natalie: it is the report of a police case."

At his thus addressing her by her Christian name the mother started somewhat, and the demure eyes of the girls were turned to the floor, lest they should meet any conscious glance.

"Here is a fellow brought before the Hammersmith magistrate for indulging in a new form of amusement. Oh, very pretty! very nice! He had only got hold of a small dog and he was taking it by the two forelegs, and trying how far he could heave it. Very well; he is brought before the magistrates. He had only heaved the dog two or three times; nothing at all, you know. You think he will get off with a forty shillings fine, or something like that. Not altogether! Two months' hard labor—*two solid months' hard labor*; and if I had my will of the brute," he continued, savagely, "I would give ten years' hard labor, and bury him alive when he came out. However, two months' hard labor is something. I glory in that magistrate; I have just been up-stairs writing a note asking him to dine with me. I believe I was introduced to him once."

"Evelyn quite goes beside himself," his mother said to her guest, with half an air of apology, "when he reads about cruelty like that."

"Surely it is better than being callous," said Natalie, speaking very gently.

They went in to dinner; and the young ladies were very well behaved indeed. They did not at all resent the fashion in which the whole attention of the dinner-table was given to the stranger.

"And so you like living in England?" said Lady Evelyn to her.

"I cannot breathe elsewhere," was the simple answer.

"Why," said the matter-of-fact, silver-haired lady, "if this country is notorious for anything, it is for its foggy atmosphere!"

"I think it is famous for something more than that," said the girl, with just a touch of color in the beautiful face; for she was not accustomed to speak before so many people. "Is it not more famous for its freedom? It is that that makes the air so sweet to breathe."

"Well, at all events, you don't find it very picturesque as compared with other countries. Evelyn tells me you have travelled a great deal."

"Perhaps I am not very fond of picturesqueness," Natalie said, modestly. "When I am travelling through a country I would rather see plenty of small farms, thriving and prosperous, than splendid ruins that tell only of oppression and extravagance, and the fierceness of war."

No one spoke ; so she made bold to continue—but she addressed Lady Evelyn only.

"No doubt it is very picturesque, as you go up the Rhine, or across the See Kreis, or through the Lombard plains, to see every height crowned with its castle. Yes, one cannot help admiring. They are like beautiful flowers that have blossomed up from the valleys and the plains below. But who tilled the land, that these should grow there on every height ? Are you not forced to think of the toiling wretches who labored and labored to carry stone by stone up the crest of the hill ? They did not get much enjoyment out of the grandeur and picturesqueness of the castles."

"But they gave that labor for their own protection," Lady Evelyn said, with a smile. "The great lords and barons were their protectors."

"The great lords and barons said so, at least," said the girl, without any smile at all, "and I suppose the peasantry believed them ; and were quite willing to leave their vineyards and go and shed their blood whenever the great lords and barons quarrelled among themselves."

"Well said ! well said !" Brand exclaimed, quickly ; though, indeed, this calm, gentle-eyed, self-possessed girl was in no need of any champion.

"I am afraid you are a great Radical, Miss Lind," said Lady Evelyn.

"Perhaps it is your English air, Lady Evelyn," said the girl, with a smile.

Lord Evelyn's mother, notwithstanding her impassive, unimaginative nature, soon began to betray a decided interest in this new guest, and even something more. She was attracted, to begin with, by the singular beauty of the young Hungarian lady, which was foreign-looking, unusual, picturesque. She was struck by her perfect self-possession, and by the ease and grace of her manner, which was rather that of a mature woman than of a girl of nineteen. But most of all she was interested in her odd talk and opinions, which she expressed with such absolute simplicity and frankness. Was it, Lady Evelyn asked herself, that the girl had been brought up so much in the society of men—that she had neither mother nor sisters—that she spoke of politics and such matters as if it

the most natural thing in the world for women, of whatever age, to consider them as of first importance ?

But one chance remark that Natalie made, on the impulse of the moment, did for the briefest possible time break down that charming self-confidence of hers, and show her—to the wonderment of the English girls—the prey of an alarmed embarrassment. George Brand had been talking of patriotism, and of the scorn that must naturally be felt for the man who would say of his country, “Well, it will last my time. Let me enjoy myself when I can. What do I care about the future of other people ?” And then he went on to talk of the larger patriotism that concerned itself not merely with one’s fellow-countrymen but with one’s fellow-mortals ; and how the stimulus and enthusiasm of that wider patriotism should be proportionately stronger ; and how it might seek to break down artificial barriers of political systems and religious creeds. Patriotism was a beautiful flame—a star ; but here was a sun. Ordinary, to tell the truth, Brand was but an indifferent speaker—he had all an Englishman’s self-consciousness ; but now he spoke for Natalie alone, and minded the others but little. Presently Lady Evelyn said, with a smile,

“You, too, Miss Lind, are a reformer, are you not ? Evelyn is very mysterious, and I can’t quite make out what he means ; but at all events it is very kind of you to spare us an evening when you must be so deeply engaged.”

“I ?” said Natalie. “Oh no, it is very little that I can do. The work is too difficult and arduous for women, perhaps. But there is one thing that women can do—they can love and honor those who are working for them.”

It was spoken impulsively—probably the girl was thinking only of her father. But at the moment she happened to look up, and there were Rosalys D’Agincourt’s calmly observant eyes fixed on her. Then some vague echo of what she had said rushed in upon her ; she was bewildered by the possible interpretation others might put on the words ; and the quick, sensitive blood mounted to her forehead. But fortunately Lady Evelyn, who had missed the whole thing, happened at this very instant to begin talking of orchids, and Natalie struck in with great relief. So that little episode went by.

And, as dinner went on, Brand became more and more convinced that this family was the most delightful family in England. Just so much restraint had left their manner as to render those madcap girls exceedingly frank and good-natured in the courtesy they showed to their guest, and to admit her as a confidante into their ways of bantering each other. And

one would herself come round to shift the fire-screen behind Miss Lind to precisely the proper place; and another said that Miss Lind drank water because Evelyn had been so monstrously stupid as not to have any Hungarian wine for her; and another asked if she might call on Miss Lind the following afternoon, to take her to some place where some marvellous Japanese curiosities were on view. Then, when they left for the drawing-room, the eldest Miss D'Agincourt put her arm within the arm of their guest, and said,

"Now, dear Miss Lind, please understand that, if there was any stranger here at all, we should not dream of asking you to sing. Ermentrude and I take all that on our shoulders; we squawk for the whole of the family. But Evelyn has told us so much about your singing—"

"Oh, I will sing for you if you wish it," said Natalie, without hesitation.

Some little time thereafter Brand was walking up and down the room below, slowly and thoughtfully: he was not much of a wine-drinker.

"Evelyn," he said, suddenly, "I shall soon be able to tell you whether I owe you a life-long gratitude. I owe you much already. Through you I have got some work to do in the world; I am busy, and content. But there is a greater prize."

"I think I can guess what you mean," his companion said, calmly.

"You do?" said the other, with a quick look. "And you do not think I am mad?—to go and ask her to be my wife before she has given me a single word of hope?"

"She has spoken to others about you: I know what she thinks of you," said Lord Evelyn. Then the fine, pale face was slightly flushed. "To tell you the truth, Brand, I thought of this before you ever saw her."

"Thought of what?" said the other, with a stare of surprise.

"That you would be the right sort of man to make a husband for her: she might be left alone in the world at any moment, without a single relation, and scarcely a friend."

"Women don't marry for these reasons," said the other, somewhat absently. "And yet, if she were to think of it, it would not be as if I were withdrawing her from everything she takes an interest in. We should be together. I am eager to go forward, even by myself; but with her for a companion—think of that!"

"I have thought of it," said Lord Evelyn, with something of a sad smile. "Often. And there is no man in England

more heartily wishes you success than I do. Come, let us go up to the drawing-room."

They went out into the hall. Some one was playing a noisy piece up-stairs; it was safe to speak. And then he said,

"Shall I tell you something, Brand?—something that will keep you awake all this night, and not with the saddest of thinking? If I am not mistaken, I fancy you have already 'stole bonny Glenlyon away.'"

CHAPTER XVI.

A LETTER.

BLACK night lay over the city, and silence; the river flowed unseen through the darkness; but a thousand golden points of fire mapped out the lines of the Embankment and the long curves of the distant bridges. The infrequent sounds that could be heard were strangely distinct, even when they were faint and remote. There was a slight rustling of wind in the trees below the window.

But the night and the silence brought him neither repose nor counsel. A multitude of bewildering, audacious hopes and distracting fears strove for mastery in his mind, upsetting altogether the calm and cool judgment on which he prided himself. His was not a nature to harbor illusions; he had a hard way of looking at things; and yet—and yet—might not this chance speech of Lord Evelyn have been something more than a bit of good-humored raillery? Lord Evelyn was Natalie's intimate friend; he knew all her surroundings; he was a quick observer; he was likely to know if this thing was possible. But, on the other hand, how was it possible that so beautiful a creature, in the perfect flower of her youth, should be without a lover? He forced himself to remember that she and her father seemed to see no society at all. Perhaps she was too useful to him, and he would not have her entangle herself with many friends. Perhaps they had led too nomadic a life. But even in hotels abroad, how could she have avoided the admiration she was sure to evoke? And in Florence, mayhap, or Mentone, or Madrid; and here he began to conjure up a host of possible rivals, all foreigners, of course, and all equally detestable, and to draw pictures for him of *tables d'hôte*, with always the one beautiful figure there, unconscious, gentle, silent, but drawing to her all men's eyes.

There was but the one way of putting an end to this maddening uncertainty. He dared not claim an interview with her; she might be afraid of implying too much by granting it; various considerations might dictate a refusal. But he could write; and, in point of fact, writing-materials were on the table. Again and again he had sat down and taken the pen in his hand, only to get up as often and go and stare out into the yellow glare of the night. For an instant his shadow would fall on the foliage of the trees below, and then pass away again like a ghost.

At two-and-twenty love is reckless, and glib of speech; it takes little heed of the future; the light straw-flame, for however short a period, leaps up merrily enough. But at two-and-thirty it is more alive to consequences; it is not the present moment, but the duration of life, that it regards; it seeks to proceed with a sure foot. And at this crisis, in the midst of all this irresolution, that was unspeakably vexatious to a man of his firm nature, Brand demanded of himself his utmost power of self-control. He would not imperil the happiness of his life by a hasty, importunate appeal. When at length he sat down, determined not to rise until he had sent her this message, he forced himself to write—at the beginning, at least—in a roundabout and indifferent fashion, so that she should not be alarmed. He began by excusing his writing to her, saying he had scarcely ever had a chance of talking to her, and that he wished to tell her something of what had happened to him since the memorable evening on which he had first met her at her father's house. And he went on to speak to her of a friend of his, who used to amuse himself with the notion that he would like to enter himself at a public school and go through his school life all over again. There he had spent the happiest of his days; why should he not repeat them? If only the boys would agree to treat him as one of themselves, why should he not be hail-fellow-well-met with them, and once more enjoy the fun of uproarious pillow-battles and have smuggled tarts and lemonade at night, and tame rabbits where no rabbits should be, and a profound hero-worship for the captain of the school Eleven, and excursions out of bounds, when his excess of pocket-money would enable him to stand treat all round? "Why not?" this friend of his used to say. "Was it so very impossible for one to get back the cares and interests, the ambitions, the amusements, the high spirits of one's boyhood?" And if he now were to tell her that a far greater miracle had happened to himself? That at an age when he had fancied he had done and seen

most things worth doing and seeing, when the past seemed to contain everything worth having, and there was nothing left but to try how the tedious hours could be got over; when a listless *ennui* was eating his very heart out—that he should be presented, as it were, with a new lease of life, with stirring hopes and interests, with a new and beautiful faith, with a work that was a joy in itself, whether any reward was to be or no? And surely he could not fail to express to Lord Evelyn and to herself his gratitude for this strange thing.

These are but the harsh outlines of what, so far, he wrote; but there was a feeling in it—a touch of gladness and of pathos here and there—that had never before been in any of his writing, and of which he was himself unconscious.

But at this point he paused, and his breathing grew quick. It was so difficult to write in these measured terms. When he resumed, he wrote more rapidly.

What wonder, he made bold to ask her, if amidst all this bewildering change some still stranger dream of what might be possible in the future should have taken possession of him? She and he were leagued in sympathy as regarded the chief object of their lives; it was her voice that had inspired him; might he not hope that they should go forward together, in close friendship at least, if there could be nothing more? And as to that something more, was there no hope? He could give himself no grounds for any such hope; and yet—so much had happened to him, and mostly through her, that he could set no limit to the possibilities of happiness that lay in her generous hands. When he saw her among others, he despaired; when he thought of her alone, and of the gentleness of her heart, he dared to hope. And if this declaration of his was distressing to her, how easy it was for her to dismiss and forget it. If he had dared too much, he had himself to blame. In any case, she need not fear that her refusal should have the effect of dissociating them in those wider interests and sympathies to which he had pledged himself. He was not one to draw back. And if he had ended her, he appealed to her charity—to that which she seemed eager to extend to all living w could such a vision of possible happiness his mind without his making one effort, how to realize it? At the worst, she would for-

brief, the substance of what he wrote; but by an anxious re-reading, he put the letter in an & miserably conscious how little it conveyed of

all the hope and desire that had hold of his heart. But then, he argued with himself, if she inclined her ear so far, surely he would have other and better opportunities of pleading with her; whereas, if he had been dreaming of impossibilities, then he and she would meet the more easily in the future that he had not given too vehement an expression to all the love and admiration he felt for her. He could not sacrifice her friendship also—her society—the chances of listening from time to time to the musical, low, soft voice.

Carrying this fateful letter in his hand, he went down-stairs and out into the cool night air. And now he was haunted by a hundred fears. Again and again he was on the point of turning back to add something, to alter something, to find some phrase that would appeal more closely to her heart. And then all of a sudden he convinced himself that he should not have written at all. Why not have gone to see her, at any risk, to plead with herself? But then he would have had to write to beg for a *tete-a-tete* interview; and would not that be more distinctly alarming than this roundabout epistle, which was meant to convey so much indirectly? Finally, he arrived at the pillar letter-box; and this indisputable fact brought an end to his cogitations. If he had gone walking onward he would have wasted the night in fruitless counsel. He would have repeated again and again the sentences he had used; striven to picture her as she read; wondered if he ought not still to go back and strengthen his prayer. But now it was to be yes or no. Well, he posted the letter; and then he breathed more freely. The die was cast, for good or ill.

And, indeed, no sooner was the thing done than his spirits rose considerably, and he walked on with a lighter heart. This solitary London, all lamp-lit and silent, was a beautiful city. "*Schlaf selig und süss*," the soft stirring of the night-wind seemed to say: let her not dread the message the morning would bring! He thought of the other cities she must have visited; and if—ah, the dream of it!—if he and she were to go away together to behold the glories of the moonlight on the lagoon, and the wonders of the sunrise among the hills! He had been in Rome, he remembered, a wonderful coronet of rubies: would not that do for the beautiful black masses of hair? Or pearls? She did not appear to have much jewellery. Or rather—seeing that such things are possible between husband and wife—would she not accept the value, and far more than the value, of any jewellery she could desire, to be given away in acts of kindness? That would be more like Natalie.

He walked on, his heart full of an audacious joy ; for now this was the picture before him ; a Buckinghamshire hill ; a red and white house among the beeches ; and a spacious lawn looking out on the far and wooded plain, with its villages, and spires, and tiny curls of smoke. And this foreign young lady become an English house-mistress ; proud of her nectarines and pineapples ; proud of her Hungarian horses ; proud of the quiet and comfort of the home she can offer to her friends, when they come for a space to rest from their labors.
“*Schlaf selig und süss !*” the night-wind seemed to say : “The white morning is bringing with it a message !”

To him the morning brought an end to all those golden dreams of the night. There action had set in. His old misgivings returned with redoubled force. For one thing, there was a letter from Reitzei, saying that the man Kirski had at length consented to begin to work at his trade, and that Miss Lind need fear no further annoyance ; and somehow he did not like to see her name written in this foreign way of writing. She belonged to these foreigners ; her cares and interests were not those of one who would feel at home in that Buckinghamshire home ; she was remote. And, of course, in her manifold wanderings—in those hotels in which she had to pass the day, when her father was absent at his secret interviews—how could she avoid making acquaintances ? Even among those numerous friends of her father’s there must have been some one here or there to accompany her in her drives in the Prater, in her evenings at La Scala, in her morning walk along the Chiaja. He remembered how seldom he had seen her ; she might have many more friends in London than he had dreamed of. Who could see her, and remain blind to her beauty ? Who could know her, and remain insensible to the fascination of her enthusiasm, her faith in the right, her courage, her hope, her frank friendship with those who would help ?

He was impatient with the veteran Waters this morning ; and Waters was himself fractious, and inclined to resent sarcasm. He had just heard from Buckinghamshire that his substitute had, for some reason or other, intrusted the keys of the wine-cellar to one of the house-maids ; and that that industrious person had seized the opportunity to tilt up all the port-wine she could lay her hands on in order to polish the bottles with a duster.

“Well,” said his master, “I suppose she collected the cobwebs and sold them to a wine-merchant : they would be invaluable.”

Waters said nothing, but resolved to have a word with the young woman when he went down.

The morning was fine ; in any case, Brand could not have borne the distress of waiting in all day, on the chance of her reply coming. He had to be moving. He walked up to Lisle Street, and saw Reitzei, on the pretext of talking about Kirski.

"Lind will be back in a week," said the pallid-faced smart young man. "He writes with great satisfaction, which always means something in his case. I should not wonder if he and his daughter went to live in the States."

"Oh, indeed," said Brand, coldly ; but the words made his heart tremble.

"Yes. And if you would only go through the remaining degrees, you might take his place—who knows ?"

"Who knows, indeed ?" said Brand. "But I don't covet the honor."

There was something in his tone which made the other look up.

"I mean the responsibility," he said, quickly.

"You see," observed Reitzei, leaning back in his chair, "one must admit you are having rather hard lines. Your work is invaluable to us—Lind is most proud of it—but it is tedious and difficult, eh ? Now if they were to give you something like the Syrian business—"

"What is that ?"

"Oh, only one of the many duties the Society has undertaken," said Reitzei, carelessly. "Not that I approve because the people are Christians ; it is because they are numerically weak ; and the Mahommedans treat them shamefully. There is no one knows about it ; no one to make a row about it ; and the Government won't let the poor wretches import arms to defend themselves. Very well : very well, messieurs ! But your Government allow the importation of guns for sport. Ha ! and then, if one can find money, and an ingenious English firm to make rifle-barrels to fit into the sporting-gun stock can you conceive any greater fun than smuggling these barrels into the country ? My dear fellow, it is glorious : we could have five hundred volunteers ! But at the same time I say your work is more valuable to us. No one but an Englishman could do it. Every one knows of your success."

Brand thanked Reitzei for his good opinion, and rather absently took up his hat and left. Instinctively he made his way westward. He was sure to see her, at a distance, taking this morning stroll of hers : might he not guess something

from her face as to what her reply would be? She could not have written so soon; she would take time to consider; even a refusal would, he knew, be gently worded.

In any case, he would see her; and if her answer gave no hope, it would be the last time on which he would follow that graceful figure from afar with his eyes, and wonder to himself what the low and musical voice was saying to Anneli. And as he walked on, he grew more and more downhearted. It was a certainty that, out of all those friends of her father's some one must have dreamed of possessing this beautiful prize for his own.

When, after not much waiting, he saw Natalie and Anneli cross into the Park, he had so reasoned himself into despair that he was not surprised—at least he tried to convince himself that he was not surprised—to perceive that the former was accompanied by a stranger, the little German maid-servant walking not quite with them, and yet not altogether behind them. He could almost have expected this; and yet his eyes seemed hot, and he had some difficulty in trying to make out who this might be. And at this great distance he could only gather that he was foreign in appearance, and that he wore a peaked cap in place of a hat.

He dared not follow them now; and he was about to turn away when he saw Natalie's new companion motion to her to sit down on one of the seats. He sat down, too; and he took her hand, and held it in his. What then?

This man looking on from a distance, with a bitter heart, had no thought against her. Was it not natural for so beautiful a girl to have a lover? But that this fellow—this foreigner—should degrade her by treating her as if she were a nursery-maid flirting with one of the soldiers from the barracks down there, this filled him with bitterness and hatred. He turned and walked away with a firm step. He had no ill thoughts of her, whatever message she might send him. At the worst, she had been generous to him; she had filled his life with love and hope; she had given him a future. If this dream were shattered, at least he could turn elsewhere, and say, "Labor, be thou my good."

Meanwhile, of this stranger? He had indeed taken Natalie Lind's hand in his, and Natalie let it remain there without hesitation.

"My little daughter," said he to her in Italian, "I could have recognized you by your hands. You have the hands of your mother: no one in the world had more beautiful hands

than she had. And now I will tell you about her, if you promise not to cry any more."

It was Calabressa who spoke.

CHAPTER XVII.

CALABRESSA.

WHEN Calabressa called at the house in Curzon Street he was at once admitted; Natalie recognizing the name as that of one of her father's old friends. Calabressa had got himself up very smartly, to produce an impression on the little Natalushka whom he expected to see. His military-looking coat was tightly buttoned; he had burnished up the gold braid of his cap; and as he now ascended the stairs he gathered the ends of his mustache out of his yellow-white beard and curled them round and round his fingers and pulled them out straight. He had already assumed a pleasant smile.

But when he entered the shaded drawing-room, and beheld this figure before him, all the dancing-master's manner instantly fled from him. He seemed thunderstruck; he shrunk back a little; his cap fell to the floor; he could not utter a word.

"Excuse me—excuse me, mademoiselle," he gasped out at length, in his odd French. "Ah, it is like a ghost—like other years come back—"

He stared at her.

"I am very pleased to see you, sir," said she to him, gently, in Italian.

"Her voice also—her voice also!" he exclaimed, almost to himself, in the same tongue. "Signorina, you will forgive me—but—when one sees an old friend—you are so like—ah, so like—"

"You are speaking of my mother?" the girl said, with her eyes cast down. "I have been told that I was like her. You knew her, signore?"

Calabressa pulled himself together somewhat. He picked up his cap; he assumed a more business-like air.

"Oh yes, signorina, I knew her," he said, with an apparent carelessness, but he was regarding her all the same. "Yes, I knew her well. We were friends long before she married. What, are you surprised that I am so old? Do you know

that I can remember you when you were a very little thing—at Dunkirk it was—and what a valiant young lady you were, and you would go to fight the Russians all by yourself! And you—you do not remember your mother?”

“I cannot tell,” she said, sadly. “They say it is impossible, and yet I seem to remember one who loved me, and my grief when I asked for her and found she would never come back—or else that is only my recollection of what I was told by others. But what of that? I know where she is now: she is my constant companion. I know she loved me; I know she is always regarding me; I talk to her, so that I am never quite alone; at night I pray to her, as if she were a saint—”

She turned aside somewhat; her eyes were full of tears. Calabressa said quickly,

“Ah, signorina, why recall what is so sad? It is so useless. *Allons donc!* shall I tell you of my surprise when I saw you first? A ghost—that is nothing! It is true, your father warned me. He said, ‘The little Natalushka is a woman now.’ But how could one believe it?”

She had recovered her composure; she begged him to be seated.

“*Bien!* One forgets. Then my old mother—my dear young lady, even I, old as I am, have a mother—what does she do but draw a prize in the Austro-Hungarian lottery—a huge prize—enough to demoralize one for life—five thousand florins. More remarkable still, the money is paid. Not so remarkable, my good mother declares she will give half of it to an undutiful son, who has never done very well with money in this world. We come to the *denouement* quickly. ‘What,’ said I, ‘shall I do with my new-found liberty and my new-found money? To the devil with banks! I will be off and away to the land of fogs to see my little friend Natalushka, and ask her what she thinks of the Russians now.’ And the result? My little daughter, you have given me such a fright that I can feel my hands still trembling.”

“I am very sorry,” said she, with a smile. This gay manner of his had driven away her sad memories. It seemed quite natural to her that he should address her as “My little daughter.”

“But where are the fogs? It is a paradise that I have reached—the air clear and soft, the gardens beautiful. This morning I said to myself, ‘I will go early. Perhaps the little Natalushka will be going out for a walk; perhaps we will go together.’ No, signorina,” said he, with a mock-

heroic bow, "it was not with the intention of buying you toys. But was I not right? Do I not perceive by your costume that you were about to go out?"

"That is nothing, signore," said she. "It would be very strange if I could not give up my morning walk for an old friend of my father's."

"*Au contraire*, you shall not give up your walk," said he, with great courtesy. "We will go together; and then you will tell me about your father."

She accepted this invitation without the slightest scruple. It did not occur to her—as it would naturally have occurred to most English girls—that she would rather not go walking in Hyde Park with a person who looked remarkably like the leader of a German band.

But Calabressa had known her mother.

"Ah, signore," said she, when they had got into the outer air, "I shall be so grateful to you if you will tell me about my mother. My father will not speak of her; I dare not awaken his grief again; he must have suffered much. You will tell me about her."

"My little daughter, your father is wise. Why awaken old sorrows? You must not spoil your eyes with more crying."

And then he went on to speak of all sorts of things, in his rapid, interjectional fashion—of his escape from prison mostly—until he perceived that she was rather silent and sad.

"Come then," said he, "we will sit down on this seat. Give me your hand."

She placed her hand in his without hesitation; and he patted it gently, and said how like it was to the hand of her mother.

"You are a little taller than she was," said he; "a little—not much. Ah, how beautiful she was! She had many sweethearts."

He was silent for a minute or two.

"Some of them richer, some of them of nobler birth than your father; and one of them her own cousin, whom all her family wanted her to marry. But you know, little daughter, your father is a very determined man—"

"But she loved him the best?" said the girl, quickly.

"Ah, no doubt, no doubt," said Calabressa. "He is very kind to you, is he not?"

"Oh yes. Who could be kinder? But about my mother, signore?"

Calabressa seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"To say the truth, little daughter, how am I to tell you? I scarcely ever saw her after she married. Before then, you must imagine yourself as you are to think of her picture: and she was very much beloved—and very fond of horses. Is not that enough to tell? Ah, yes, another thing: she was very brave when there was any danger; and you know all the family were strong patriots; and one or two got into sad trouble. When her father—that is your grandfather, little daughter—when he failed to escape into Turkey after the assassination—"

Here Calabressa stopped, and then gave a slight wave of his hand.

"These are matters not interesting to you. But when her father had to seek a hiding-place she went with him in despite of everybody. I do not suppose he would be alive now but for her devotion."

"Is my mother's father alive?" the girl said, with eyes wide open.

"I believe so; but the less said about it the better, little daughter."

"Why has my father never told me?" she asked, with the same almost incredulous stare.

"Have I not hinted? The less said the better. There are some things no government will amnesty. Your grandfather was a good patriot, little daughter."

Thereafter for some minutes silence. Slight as was the information Calabressa had given her, it was of intensest interest to her. There was much for her to think over. Her mother, whom she had been accustomed to regard as a beautiful saint, placed far above the common ways of earth, was suddenly presented to her in a new light. She thought of her young, handsome, surrounded with lovers, proud-spirited and patriotic—a devoted daughter, a brave woman.

"You also loved her?" she said to Calabressa.

The man started. She had spoken quite innocently—almost absently: she was thinking that he, too, must have loved the brave young Hungarian girl as all the world loved her.

"I?" said Calabressa. "Oh yes, I was a friend of hers for many years. I taught her Italian; she corrected my Magyar. Once her horse ran away; I was walking, and saw her coming; there was a wagon and oxen, and I shouted to the man; he drew the oxen right across the road, and barred the way. Ah, how angry she used to be—she pretended to

be—when they told her I had saved her life! She was a bold rider.”

Presently Calabressa said, with a lighter air,

“Come, let us talk of something else—of you, *par exemple*. How do you like the English? You have many sweethearts among them, of course.”

“No, signore, I have no sweethearts,” said Natalie, without any trace of embarrassment.

“What! Is it possible? When I saw your father in Venice, and he told me the little Natalushka had grown to be a woman, I said to him, ‘Then she will marry an Englishman.’ ”

“And what did he say?” the girl asked, with a startled look on her face.

“Oh, little, very little. If there was no possibility, why should he say much?”

“I have no sweethearts,” said Natalie, simply; “but I have a friend—who wishes to be more than a friend. And it is now, when I have to answer him, it is now that I know what a sad thing it is to have no mother.”

The pathetic vibration that Brand had noticed was in her voice; her eyes were downcast, her hands clasped. For a second or two Calabressa was silent.

“I am not idly curious, my little daughter,” he said at length, and very gently; “but if you knew how long your mother and I were friends, you would understand the interest I feel in you, and why I came all this way to see the little Natalushka. So, one question, dear little one. Does your father approve?”

“Ah, how can I tell?”

He took her hand, and his face was grave.

“Listen now,” said he; “I am going to give you advice. If your mother could speak to you, this is what she would say: Whatever happens—whatever happens—do not thwart your father’s wishes.”

She wished to withdraw her hand, but he still held it.

“I do not understand you,” she said. “Papa’s wishes will always be for my happiness; why should I think of thwarting them?”

“Why, indeed? And again, why? It is my advice to you, my little daughter, whether you think your father’s wishes are for your happiness or not—because, you know, sometimes fathers and daughters have different ideas—do not go against his will.”

The hot blood mounted to Natalie’s forehead—for the first time during this interview.

"Are you predicting strife, signore? I owe obedience to my father, I know it; but I am not a child. I am a woman, and have my own wishes. My papa would not think of thwarting them."

"Natalushka, you must not be angry with me."

"I am not angry, signore; but you must not suppose that I am quite a child."

"Pardieu, non!" said Calabressa. "I expected to find Natalushka; I find Natalie—ah, Heaven! that is the wonder and the sadness of it to me! I think I am talking to your mother: these are her hands. I listen to her voice: it seems twenty years ago. And you have a proud spirit, as she had: again I say—do not thwart your father's wishes, Natalie—rather, Natalushka!"

He spoke with such an obvious kindness and earnestness that she could not feel offended.

"And if you want any one to help you at any time, my little daughter—for who knows the ways of the world, and what may happen?—if your father is sent away, and you are alone, and you want some one to do something for you, then this is what you will say to yourself: 'There is that old fool Calabressa, who has nothing in the world to do but smoke cigarettes and twirl his mustache—I will send for Calabressa.' And this I promise, little one, that Calabressa will very soon be at your feet."

"I thank you signore."

"It is true, I may be away on duty, as your father might be; but I have friends at head-quarters; I have done some service. And if I were to say, 'Calabressa wishes to be relieved from duty; it is the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi who demands his presence,' I know the answer: 'Calabressa will proceed at once to obey the commands of the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi.'"

"But who—"

"No, my little daughter, you must not ask that. I will tell you only that they are all-powerful; that they will protect you—with Calabressa as their agent; and before I leave this city I will give you my address, or rather I will give you an address where you will find some one who will guide you to me. May Heaven grant that there be no need. Why should harm come to one who is so beautiful and so gentle?"

"My mother—was she happy?" she said quickly.

"Little daughter," said he, sharply, and he threw away her hand, "if you ask me any more questions about your mother you will make my heart bleed. Do you not understand so

simple a thing as that, you who claim to be a woman? You have been stabbing me. Come, come: *allons!*—let us talk of something else—of your friend who wishes to be more than a friend—you wicked little one, who have no sweetheart! And what are those fools of English about? What? But tell me—is he one of us?”

“Oh yes, signore,” said she; and instead of showing any shamefacedness, she turned toward him and regarded him with the fearless, soft dark eyes. “How could you think otherwise? And he is so brave and noble: he is not afraid of sacrificing those things that the English put such store by—”

“English?” said Calabressa.

“Yes,” said Natalie; and now she looked down.

“And what does your heart say?”

She spoke very gently in reply.

“Signor, I have not answered him yet; you cannot expect me to answer you.”

“A la bonne heure! Little traitress, to say she has no sweethearts! Happy Englishman! What, then, do I distress you? It is not so simple! It is an embarrassment, this proposal that he has made to you! But I will not trouble you further with my questions, little daughter: how can an old jail-bird like myself understand a young linnet—thing that has always been flying and fluttering about in happiness and the free air? Enfin, let us go! I perceive your little maid is tired of standing and staring; perhaps it is time for you to go back.”

She rose, and the three of them slowly proceeded along the gravelled path.

“Your father does not return until next week: must I wait a whole week in this desert of a town before seeing you again, petite?”

“Oh no,” said Natalie, smiling; “that is not necessary. If my papa were here now he would certainly ask you to dine with us to-night; may I do so in his place? You will not find much amusement; but Madame Potecki—you knew her husband, perhaps?”

“Potecki the Pole, who was killed?”

“Yes. She will play a little music for you. But there are so many amusements in London, perhaps you would rather not spend your evening with two poor solitary creatures like us.”

“My little daughter, to hear you speak, that is all I want; it takes twenty years away from my life; I do not know

whether to laugh or to cry. But *courage!* we will put a good face on our little griefs. This evening—this evening I will pretend to myself something—I am going to live my old life over again—for an hour; I will blow a horn as soon as I have crossed the Erlau, and they will hear it up at the big house among the pines, where the lights are shining through the dark, and they will send a servant down to open the gates; and you will appear at the hall-door, and say, ‘Signor Calabressa, why do you make such a noise to awaken the dogs?’ And I will say, ‘Dear Miss Berezolyi, the pine-woods are frightfully dark; may I not scare away the ghosts?’”

“It was my mother who received you,” the girl said, in a low voice.

“It was Natalie then; to-night it will be Natalushka.”

He spoke lightly, so as not to make these reminiscences too serious. But the conjunction of the two names seemed suddenly to startle the girl. She stopped, and looked him in the face.

“It was you, then,” she said, “who sent me the locket?”

“What locket?” he said, with surprise.

“The locket the lady dropped into my lap—‘*From Natalie to Natalushka.*’”

“I declare to you, little daughter, I never heard of it.”

The girl looked bewildered.

“Ah, how stupid I am!” she exclaimed. “I could not understand. But if they always called her Natalie, and me Natalushka—”

She paused for a moment to collect her thoughts.

“Signor Calabressa, what does it mean?” she said, almost wildly. “If one sends me a locket—‘*From Natalie to Natalushka*’—was it my mother’s? Did she intend it for me? Did she leave it for me with some one, long ago? How could it come into the hands of a stranger?”

Calabressa himself seemed rather bewildered—almost alarmed.

“My little daughter, you have no doubt guessed right,” he said, soothingly. “Your mother may have meant it for you—and—and perhaps it was lost—and just recovered—”

“Signor Calabressa,” said she—and he could have fancied it was her mother who was speaking in that low, earnest, almost sad voice—“you said you would do me an act of friendship if I asked you. I cannot ask my father; he seems too grieved to speak of my mother at any time; but do you think you could find out who the lady was who brought that locket to me? That would be kind of you, if you could do that.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

HER ANSWER.

HUMPHREYS, the delegate from the North, and O'Halloran, the Irish reporter, had been invited by George Brand to dine with him on this evening—Humphreys having to start for Wolverhampton next day—and the three were just sitting down when Lord Evelyn called in, uninvited, and asked if he might have a plate placed for him. Humphreys was anxious that their host should set out with him for the North in the morning; but Brand would not promise. He was obviously thinking of other things. He was at once restless, preoccupied, and silent.

“I hope, my lord, you have come to put our friend here in better spirits,” said Humphreys, blushing a little as he ventured to call one of the Brands of Darlington his friend.

“What is the matter?”

At this moment Waters appeared at the door with a letter in his hand. Brand instantly rose, went forward to him and took the letter, and retired into an adjoining room. Without looking, he knew from whom it had come.

His hand was shaking as he opened the envelope; but the words that met his eyes were calm.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter has given me joy and pain. Joy that you still adhere to your noble resolve; that you have found gladness in your life; that you will work on to the end, whatever the fruit of the work may be. But this other thought of yours—that only distresses me; it clouds the future with uncertainty and doubt, where there should only be clear faith. My dear friend, I must ask you to put away that thought. Let the *feu sacré* of the regenerator, the liberator, have full possession of you. How I should blame myself if I were to distract you from the aims to which you have devoted your life. I have no one to advise me; but this I know is *right*. You will, I think, not misunderstand me—you will not think it unmaidenly of me—if I confess to you that I have written these words with some pain, some touch of regret that all is not possible to you that you may desire. But for one soul on devotion. Do I express myself clearly?—you know English is not my native tongue. If we may not go through life together, in the sense that you mean, we need not be far apart; and you will know, as you go for-

ward in the path of a noble duty, that there is not any one who regards you and the work you will do with a greater pride and affection than your friend,
NATALIE."

What could it all mean? he asked himself. This was not the letter of a woman who loved another man; she would have been more explicit; she would have given sufficient reason for her refusal. He read again, with a beating heart, with a wild hope, that veiled and subtle expression of regret. Was it not that she was prepared to sacrifice forever those dreams of a secure and happy and loving life, that come naturally to a young girl, lest they should interfere with what she regarded as the higher duty, the more imperative devotion? In that case, it was for a firmer nature than her own to take this matter in hand. She was but a child; knowing nothing of the sorrows of the world, of the necessity of protection, of the chances the years might bring. Scarcely conscious of what he did—so eagerly was his mind engaged—he opened a drawer and locked the letter in. Then he went hastily into the other room.

"Evelyn," said he, "will you take my place, like a good fellow? I shall be back as soon as I can. Waters will get you everything you want."

"But about Wolverhampton, Mr. Brand?" shouted Humphreys after him.

There was no answer; he was half-way down the stairs.

When the hansom arrived in Curzon Street a hurried glance showed him that the dining-room was lit up. She was at home, then: that was enough. For the rest, he was not going to trouble himself with formalities when so beautiful a prize might still be within his reach.

He knocked at the door; the little Anneli appeared.

"Anneli," said he, "I want to see Miss Lind for a moment—say I shall not detain her, if there is any one with her—"

"They are in the dining-room, sir; Madame Potecki, and a strange gentleman—"

"Ask your mistress to let me see her for one moment; don't you understand?"

"They are just finishing dinner, sir: if you will step up to the drawing-room they will be there in a minute or two."

But at last he got the little German maid to understand that he wished to see Miss Lind alone for the briefest possible time; and that she was to carry this message in an undertone to her mistress. By himself he made his way upstairs to the drawing-room: the lamps were lit.

He lifted books, photographs, and what not, with trembling fingers, and put them down again without knowing it. He was thinking, not looking. And he was trying to force himself into a masterful mood. She was only a child, he kept repeating to himself—only a child, who wanted guidance, instruction, a protecting hand: It was not her fancies, however generous and noble, that should shape the destinies of two lives. A beautiful child, ignorant of the world and its evil: full of dreams of impossible and unnecessary self-sacrifice, she was not one to ordain; surely her way in life was to be led, and cherished, and loved, trusting to the stronger hand for guidance and safety.

There was a slight rustle outside, and presently Natalie entered the room. She was pale—perhaps she looked all the paler that she wore the long, sweeping black dress she had worn at Lady Evelyn's. In silence she gave him her hand; he took it in both his.

“Natalie!”

It was a cry of entreaty, almost of pain; for this fond vision of his of her being only a child, to be mastered and guided, had fled the moment he caught sight of this tall and beautiful woman, whose self-command, despite that paleness and a certain apprehension in the dark eyes, was far greater than his own.

“Natalie, you must give me a clearer answer.”

He tried to read the answer in her eyes; but she lowered them as she spoke.

“Was not my answer clear?” she said, gently. “I wished not to give you pain.”

“But was all your answer there?” he said quickly. “Were there no other reasons? Natalie! don't you know that, if you regretted your decision ever so little—if you thought twice about it—if even now you can give me leave to hope that one day you will be my wife—there were no reasons at all in your letter for your refusing—none at all? If you love me even so little that you regret—”

“I must not listen to you,” she said hurriedly. “No, no. My answer was best for us both. I am sorry if it pains you; but you have other things to think of; we have our separate duties in the world—duties that are of first importance. My dear friend,” she continued, with an air of appeal, “don't you see how I am situated? I have no one to advise me—not even my father, though I can guess what he would say. I know what he would say; and my heart tells me that I have done right.”

"One word," said he. "This you must answer me frankly. Is there no other reason for your refusal? Is your heart free to choose?"

She looked up and met his eyes for a moment; only for a moment.

"I understand you," she said, with some slight color mounting to the pale clear olive of her brow. "No, there is not any reason like that."

A quick, proud light leaped into his eyes.

"Then," said he, "I refuse to accept your refusal. Natalie, you will be my wife!"

"Oh, do not say that—do not think of it. I have done wrong even to listen, to let you speak—"

"But what I say is true. I claim you, as surely as I now hold your hand—"

"Hush!"

There were two people coming into the room; he did not care if there were a regiment. He relinquished her hand, it is true; but there was a proud and grateful look on his face; he did not even turn to regard the new-comers.

These were Madame Potecki and Calabressa. The little Polish lady had misconstrued Natalie's parting words to mean that some visitors had arrived, and that she and Calabressa were to follow when they pleased. Now that they had appeared in the drawing-room, they could not fail to perceive how matters stood, and, in fact, the little gentlewoman was on the point of retiring. But Natalie was quite mistress of the situation. She reminded Madame Potecki that she had met Mr. Brand before. She introduced Calabressa to the stranger, saying that he was a friend of her father's.

"It is opportune—it is a felicitous circumstance," said Calabressa, in his nasal French. "Mademoiselle, behold the truth. If I do not have a cigarette after my food, I die—veritably I die! Now your friend, the friend of the house, surely he will take compassion on me; and we will have a cigarette together in some apartment."

Here he touched Brand's elbow, having sidled up to him. On any other occasion Brand would have resented the touch, the invitation, the mere presence of this theatrical-looking albino. But he was not in a captious mood. How could he refuse when he heard Natalie say, in her soft, low voice,

"Will you be so kind, Mr. Brand? Anneli will light up papa's little smoking-room."

Directly afterward he found himself in the small study, alone with this odd-looking person, whom he easily recog-

nized as the stranger who had been walking in the Park with Natalie in the morning. Closer inspection rendered him less afraid of this rival.

Calabressa rolled a cigarette between his fingers, and lit it.

"I ask your pardon, monsieur. I ask your pardon beforehand. I am about to be impertinent; it is necessary. If you will tell me some things, I will tell you some things which it may be better for you to know. First, then, I assume that you wish to marry that dear child, that beautiful young lady up-stairs."

"My good friend, you are a little bit too outrageous," said Brand.

"Ah! Then I must begin. You know, perhaps, that the mother of this young lady is alive?"

"Alive!"

"I perceive you do not know," said Calabressa, coolly. "I thought you would know—I thought you would guess. A child might guess. She told me you had seen the locket—*Natalie to Natalushka*—was not that enough?"

"If Miss Lind herself did not guess that her mother was alive, how should I?"

"If you have been brought up for sixteen or eighteen years to mourn one as dead, you do not quickly imagine that he or she is not dead: you perceive?"

"Well, it is extraordinary enough," said Brand, thoughtfully. "With such a daughter, if she has the heart of a mother at all, how could she remain away from her for sixteen years?"

A thought struck him, and his forehead colored quickly.

"There was no disgrace?"

At this word Calabressa started, and the small eyes flashed fire.

"I tell you, monsieur, that it is not in my presence that any one must mention the word disgrace and also the name of Natalie Berezolyi. No; I will answer—I myself—I will answer for the good name of Natalie Berezolyi, by the bounty of Heaven!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You are ignorant—you made a mistake. And I—well, you perceive, monsieur, that I am not ashamed to confess—I loved her; she was the radiant light, the star of my life!"

"La lumiere rayonnante, l'étoile de ma vie!"—the phrases sounded ridiculous enough when uttered by this histrionic person; but even his self-conscious gesticulation did not of-

fend Brand. This man, at all events, had loved the mother of Natalie.

"Then it was some very powerful motive that kept mother and daughter apart?" said he.

"Yes; I cannot explain it all to you, if I quite know it all. But every year the mother comes with a birthday present of flowers for the child, and watches to see her once or twice; and then away back she goes to the retreat of her father. Ah, the devotion of that beautiful saint! If there is a heaven at all, Natalie Berezolyi will be among the angels."

"Then you have come to tell Natalie that her mother is alive. I envy you. How grateful the girl will be to you!"

"I? What, I? No, truly, I dare not. And that is why I wish to speak to you: I thought perhaps you would guess, or find out: then I say, do not utter a word! Why do I give you this secret? Why have I sought to speak with you, monsieur? Well, if you will not speak, I will. Something the little Natalushka said—to me she must always be the little Natalushka in name, though she is so handsome a woman now—something she said to me revealed a little secret. Then I said, 'Perhaps Natalushka will have a happier life than Natalie has had, only her husband must be discreet.' Now, monsieur, listen to me. What I said to Natalushka I say to you: do not thwart her father's wishes. He is a determined man, and angry when he is opposed."

"My good sir, other people may have an ounce or two of determination also. You mean that I must never let Natalie know that her mother is alive, for fear of Lind? Is that what you mean? Come, then!"

He strode to the door, and had his hand on the handle, when Calabressa jumped up and caught him, and interposed.

"For Heaven's sake—for Heaven's sake, monsieur, why be so inconsiderate, so rash?"

"Has the dread of this man frightened you out of your wits?"

"He is invulnerable—and implacable," said Calabressa. "But he is a good friend when he has his own way. Why not be friends? You will have to ask him for his daughter. Consider, monsieur, that is something."

"Well, there is reason in that," Brand said, reflectively. "And I am inclined to be friendly with every one to-night, Signor Calabressa. It may be that Lind has his reasons; and he is the natural guardian of his daughter—at present. But she might have another guardian, Signor Calabressa?"

“The wicked one!—she has promised herself to you? And she told me she had no sweethearts, the rogue!”

“No, she has not promised. But what may not one dare to hope for, when one sees her so generous and kind? She is like her mother, is she not? Now I am going to slip away, Signor Calabressa; when you have had another cigarette, will you go up-stairs and explain to the two ladies that I have three friends who are now dining at my house, and I must get back to them?”

Calabressa rose, and took the taller man's hand in his.

“I think our little Natalushka is right in trusting herself to you; I think you will be kind to her; I know you will be brave enough to protect her. All very well. But you English are so headstrong. Why not a little caution, a little prudence, to smooth the way through life?”

Brand laughed; but he had taken a liking to this odd-looking man.

“Now, good-night, Signor Calabressa. You have done me a great service. And if Natalie's mother wishes to see her daughter—well, I think the opportunity will come. In the mean time, I will be quite cautious and prudent, and compromise nobody; even if I cannot wholly promise to tremble at the name of the Invulnerable and the Implacable.”

“Ah, monsieur,” said Calabressa, with a sigh, his gay gesticulation having quite left him, “I hope I have done no mischief. It was all for the little Natalushka. It will be so much better for you and for her to be on good terms with Ferdinand Lind.”

“We will see,” Brand said, lightly. “The people in this part of the world generally do as they're done by.”

CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE CULTURVEREIN.

ON calm reflection, Calabressa gave himself the benefit of his own approval; and, on the whole, was rather proud of his diplomacy. He had revealed enough, and not too much; he had given the headstrong Englishman prudent warnings and judicious counsel; he had done what he could for the future of the little Natalushka, who was the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi. But there was something more.

He went up-stairs.

"My dear little one," he said, in his queer French, "behold me—I come alone. Your English friend sends a thousand apologies—he has to return to his guests: is it an English custom to leave guests in such a manner? Ah, Madame Potecki, there is a time in one's life when one does strange things, is there not? When a farewell before strangers is hateful—impossible; when you rather go away silently than come before strangers and shake hands, and all the rest. What, wicked little one, you look alarmed! Is it a secret, then? Does not madame guess anything?"

"I entreat you, Signor Calabressa, not to speak in riddles," said Natalie, hastily. "See, here is a telegram from papa. He will be back in London on Monday next week. You can stay to see him, can you not?"

"Mademoiselle, do you not understand that I am not my own master for two moments in succession? For this present moment I am; the next I may be under orders. But if my freedom, my holiday, lasts—yes, I shall be glad to see your father, and I will wait. In the mean time, I must use up my present moment. Can you give me the address of Vincent Beratinsky?"

She wrote it down for him; it was a number in Oxford Street.

"Now I will add my excuses to those of the tall Englishman," said he, rising. "Good-night, madame. Good-night, mademoiselle—truly, it is a folly to call you the little Natalushka, who are taller than your beautiful mother. But it was the little Natalushka I was thinking about for many a year. Good-night, wicked little one, with your secrets!"

He kissed her hand, bowed once more to the little Polish lady, and left.

When, after considerable difficulty—for he was exceedingly near-sighted—he made out the number in Oxford Street, he found another caller just leaving. This stranger glanced at him, and instantly said, in a low voice,

"The night is dark, brother."

Calabressa started; but the other gave one or two signs that reassured him.

"I knew you were in London, signore, and I recognized you; we have your photograph in Lisle Street. My name is Reitzei—"

"Ah!" Calabressa exclaimed, with a new interest, as he looked at the pallid-faced young man.

"And if you wish to see Beratinsky, I will take you to him."

I find he is at the Culturverein: I was going there myself." So Calabressa suffered himself to be led away.

At this time the Culturverein used to meet in a large hall in a narrow lane off Oxford Street. It was an association of persons, mostly Germans, connected in some way or other with art, music, or letters—a merry-hearted, free-and-easy little band of people, who met every evening to laugh and talk and joke and generally forget the world and all its cares. The evening usually began with Bavarian beer, sonatas, and comic lectures; then Rhine wines began to appear, and of course these brought with them songs of love, and friendship, and patriotism; occasionally, when the older and wiser folk had gone, sweet champagne and a wild frolic prevailed until daylight came to drive the revellers out. Beratinsky belonged to the Verein by reason of his having at one time betaken himself to water-color drawing, in order to keep himself alive.

When Calabressa entered the large, long hall, the walls of which were plentifully hung with sketches in color and cartoons in black and white, the *fertig!—los!* period had not arrived. On the contrary, the meeting was exceedingly demure, almost dull; for a German music professor, seated at the piano on the platform, was playing one of his own compositions, which, however beautiful, was of considerable length; and his audience had relapsed into half-hushed conversation over their light cigars and tall glasses of Bairisch.

Beratinsky had to come along to the entrance-hall to enter the names of his visitors in a book. He was a little man, somewhat corpulent, with bushy black eyebrows, intensely black eyes, and black closely-cropped beard. The head was rather handsome; the figure not.

"Ah, Calabressa, you have come alive again!" he said, speaking in pretty fair Italian. "We heard you were in London. What is it?"

The last phrase was uttered in a low voice, though there was no by-stander. But Calabressa, with a lofty gesture, replied,

"My friend, we are not always on commissions. Sometimes we have a little liberty—a little money—a notion in our head. And if one cannot exactly travel *en prince*, *n'importe!* we have our little excursion. And if one has one's sweet-heart to see? Do you know, friend Beratinsky, that I have been dining with Natalie—the little Natalushka, as she used to be called?"

Beratinsky glanced quickly at him with the black, piercing eyes.

"Ah, the beautiful child! the beautiful child!" Calabressa exclaimed, as if he was addressing some one not present. "The mouth sweet, pathetic, like that in Titian's Assumption: you have seen the picture in the Venice Academy? But she is darker than Titian's Virgin; she is of the black, handsome Magyar breed, like her mother. You never saw her mother, Beratinsky?"

"No," said the other, rather surlily. "Come, sit down and have a cigar."

"A cigarette—a cigarette and a little cognac, if you please," said Calabressa, when the three companions had gone along to the middle of the hall and taken their seats. "Ah, it was such a surprise to me: the sight of her grown to be a woman, and the perfect, beautiful image of her mother—the very voice too—I could have thought it was a dream."

"Did you come here to talk of nothing but Lind's daughter?" said Beratinsky, with scant courtesy.

"Precisely," remarked Calabressa, in absolute good-humor. "But before that a word."

He glanced round this assemblage of foreign-looking persons, no doubt guessing at the various nationalities indicated by physique and complexion—Prussian, Pole, Rhinelander, Swiss, and what not. If the company, in English eyes, might have looked Bohemian—that is to say, unconventional in manner and costume—the Bohemianism, at all events, was of a well-to-do, cheerful, good-humored character. There was a good deal of talking besides the music.

"These gentlemen," said Calabressa, in a low voice, "are they friends—are they with us?"

"Only one or two," said Beratinsky.

"You do not come here to proselytize, then?"

"One must amuse one's self sometimes," said the little, fat, black-haired Pole, somewhat gruffly.

"Then one must take care what one says!"

"I presume that is generally the case, friend Calabressa."

But Calabressa was not offended. He was interested in what was going on.

"Par exemple," he said, in his airy way, "que vient faire la le drole?"

The music had come to an end, and the spectacled professor had retired amidst a thunder of applause. His successor, who had attracted Calabressa's attention, was a gentleman who had mounted on a high easel an immense portfolio of cartoons roughly executed in crayon; and as he exhibited them one by one, he pointed out their character-

istics with a long stick, after the manner of a showman. His demeanor was serious ; his face was grave ; his tone was simple and business-like. But as he unfolded these rude drawings, Calabressa, who understood but little German, was more and more astonished to find the guttural laughter around him increase and increase until the whole place resounded with roars, while some of the old Herren held their sides in pain, as the tears of the gigantic mirth streamed down their cheeks. Those who were able hammered loud applause on the table before them ; others rolled in their chairs ; many could only lie back and send their merriment up to the reverberating roof in shrill shrieks and yells.

"In the name of Heaven, what is it all about?" said Calabressa. "Have the people gone mad?"

"Illustrations of German proverbs," said Beratinsky, who, despite his surly manner, was himself forced to smile.

Well, Calabressa had indeed come here to talk about Lind's daughter ; but it was impossible, amidst this wild surging to and fro of Olympian laughter. At last, however, the showman came to an end of his cartoons, and solemnly made his bow, and amidst tumultuous cheering resumed his place among his companions.

There was a pause, given over to chatter and joking, and Calabressa quickly embraced this opportunity.

"You are a friend of the little Natalushka—of the beautiful Natalie, I should say, perhaps?"

"Lind's daughter does not choose to have many friends," said Beratinsky, curtly.

This was not promising ; and, indeed, the corpulent little Pole showed great disinclination to talk about the young lady who had so laid hold of Calabressa's heart. But Calabressa was not to be denied, when it was the welfare of the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi that was concerned.

"Yes, yes, friend Beratinsky, of course she is very much alone. It is rather a sad thing for a young girl to be so much alone."

"And if she chooses to be alone?" said Beratinsky, with a sharpness that resembled the snarl of a terrier.

Perhaps it was to get rid of the topic that Beratinsky here joined in a clamorous call for "Nageli ! Nageli !" Presently a fresh-colored young Switzer, laughing and blushing tremendously, went up to the platform and took his seat at the piano, and struck a few noisy chords. It was a Tyrolese song he sung, with a jodel refrain of his own invention :

“Hat einer ein Schatzerl,
 So bleibbt er dabei,
 Er nimmt sie zum Weiberl,
 Und liebt sie recht treu.
 Dann fangt man die Wirthschaft
 Gemeinschaftlich an,
 Und leibt sich, und herzt sich
 So sehr als man kann!”

Great cheering followed the skilfully executed jodel. In the midst of it, one of the members rose and said, in German,

“Meine Herren! You know our good friend Nageli is going to leave us; perhaps we shall not see him again for many years. I challenge you to drink this toast: ‘Nageli, and his quick return!’ I say to him what some of the shopkeepers in our Father-land say to their customers, ‘Kommen Sie bald wieder!’”

Here there was a great shouting of “Nageli! Nageli!” until one started the chorus, which was immediately and sonorously sung by the whole assemblage,

“Hoch soll er leben!
 Hoch soll er leben!
 Dreimal hoch!”

Another pause, chiefly devoted to the ordering of Hochheimer and the lighting of fresh cigars. The souls of the sons of the Father-land were beginning to warm.

“Friend Beratinsky,” said the anxious-hearted albino, “perhaps you know that many years ago I knew the mother of Natalie Lind; she was a neighbor—a companion—of mine; and I am interested in the little one. A young girl sometimes has need of friends. Now, you are in a position—”

“Friend Calabressa, you may save your breath,” said the other, coldly. “The young lady might have had my friendship if she had chosen. She did not choose. I suppose she is old enough—and proud enough—to choose her own friends. Yes, yes, friend Calabressa, I have heard. But we will say nothing more: now listen to this comical fellow.”

Calabressa was not thinking of the young Englishman who now sat down at the piano; a strange suspicion was beginning to fill his mind. Was it possible, he began inwardly to ask, that Vincent Beratinsky had himself aspired to marry the beautiful Hungarian girl?

This good-looking young English fellow, with a gravity equal to that of the sham showman, explained to his audience that he was composing an operetta, of which he would

give them a few passages. He was a skilful pianist. He explained, as his fingers ran up and down the keys, that the scene was in Ratcliffe Highway. A tavern: a hornpipe. Jack ashore. Unseemly squabbles: here there were harsh discords and shrill screams. Drunkenness: the music getting very helpless. Then the daylight comes—the chirping of sparrows—Jack wanders out—the breath of the morning stirs his memories—he thinks of other days. Then comes in Jack's song, which neither Calabressa nor any one else present could say was meant to be comic, or pathetic, or a demoniac mixture of both. The accompaniment which the handsome young English fellow played was at once rhythmic, and low and sad, like the wash of waves:

“Oh, the days were long,
And the summers were long,
When Jane and I went courtin’;
The hills were blue beyond the sky;
The heather was soft where we did lie;
We kissed our fill, did Jane and I,
When Jane and I went courtin’.

“When Jane and I went courtin’,
Oh, the days were long,
And the summers were long!
We walked by night beyond the quay;
Above, the stars; below, the sea;
And I kissed Jane, and Jane kissed me,
When Jane and I went courtin’.

“But Jane she married the sodger-chap;
An end to me and my courtin’.
And I took ship, and here I am;
And where I go, I care not a damn—
Rio, Jamaica, Seringapatam—
Good-bye to Jane and the courtin’.”

This second professor of gravity was abundantly cheered too when he rose from the piano; for the music was quaint and original, with a sort of unholy, grotesque pathos running through it. Calabressa resumed:

“My good Beratinsky, what is it that you have heard?”

“No matter. Natalie Lind has no need of your good offices, Calabressa. She can make friends for herself, and quickly enough, too.”

Calabressa's eyes were not keen, but his ears were; he detected easily the personal rancor in the man's tone.

“You are speaking of some one: the Englishman?”

Beratinsky burst out laughing.

"Listen, Reitzei! Even my good friend Calabressa perceives. He, too, has encountered the Englishman. Oh yes, we must all give way to him, else he will stamp on our toes with his thick English boots. You, Reitzei: how long is he to allow you to retain your office?"

"Better for him if he does not interfere with me," said the younger man. "I was always against the English being allowed to become officers. They are too arrogant; they want everything under their direction. Take their money, but keep them outside: that would have been my rule."

"And this Englishman," said Beratinsky, with a smile, though there was the light of malice in his eye, "this Englishman is not content with wanting to have the mastery of poor devils like you and me; he also wishes to marry the beautiful Natalie—the beautiful Natalie, who has hitherto been as proud as the Princess Brunhilda. Now, now, friend Calabressa, do not protest. Every one has ears, has eyes. And when papa Lind comes home—when he finds that this Englishman has been making a fool of him, and professing great zeal when he was only trying to steal away the daughter—what then, friend Calabressa?"

"A girl must marry," said Calabressa.

"I thought she was too proud to think of such things," said the other, scornfully. "However, I entreat you to say no more. What concern have I with Natalie Lind? I tell you, let her make more new friends."

Calabressa sat silent, his heart as heavy as lead. He had come with some notion that he would secure one other—powerful, and in all of Lind's secrets—on whom Natalie could rely, should any emergency occur in which she needed help. But these jealous and envious taunts, these malignant prophecies, only too clearly showed him in what relation Vincent-Beratinsky stood with regard to the daughter of Natalie Berzolyi and the Englishman, her lover.

Calabressa sat silent. When some one began to play the zither, he was thinking not of the Culturverein in London, but of the dark pine woods above the Erlau, and of the house there, and of Natalie Berzolyi as she played in the evening. He would ask Natalushka if she, too, played the zither.

CHAPTER XX.

FIDELIO.

GEORGE BRAND walked away from the house in Curzon Street in a sort of bewilderment of hope and happiness and gratitude. He would even try to accept Calabressa's well-meant counsel : why should he not be friends with everybody ? The world had grown very beautiful ; there was to be no more quarrelling in it, or envy, or malice.

In the dark he almost ran against a ragged little child who was selling flowers.

"Will you buy a rose-bud, sir ?" said she.

"What ?" he said, severely, "selling flowers at this time of night ? Get away home with you and get your supper, and go to bed ;" but he spoiled the effect of his sharp admonition by giving the girl all the silver he had in his pocket.

He found the little dinner-party in a most loquacious mood. O'Halloran in especial was in full swing. The internal economy of England was to be readjusted. The capital must be transferred to the centre of the real wealth and brain-power of the country—that is to say, somewhere about Leeds or Manchester. This proposition greatly pleased Humphreys, the man from the North, who was quite willing to let the Royal Academy, the South Kensington and National Galleries, and the British Museum remain in London, so long as the seat of government was transferred to Huddersfield or thereabouts. But O'Halloran drew such a harrowing picture of the effect produced on the South of England intellect by its notorious and intense devotion to the arts, that Humphreys was almost convicted of cruelty.

However, if these graceless people thought to humbug the hard-headed man from the North, he succeeded on one occasion in completely silencing his chief enemy, O'Halloran. That lover of paradox and idle speculation was tracing the decline of superstition to the introduction of the use of steam, and was showing how, wherever railways went in India, ghosts disappeared ; whereupon the Darlington man calmly retorted that, as far as he could see, the railways in this country were engaged in making as many ghosts as they could possibly disperse in India. This flank attack completely surprised and silenced the light skirmisher, who sought safety in lighting another cigar.

More serious matters, however, were also talked about, and

Humphreys was eager that Brand should go down to Wolverhampton with him next morning. Brand pleaded but for one day's delay. Humphreys reminded him that certain members of the Political Committee of the Trades-union Congress would be at Wolverhampton, and that he had promised to see them. After that, silence.

At last, as Humphreys and O'Halloran were leaving, Brand said, with an effort,

"No, it is no use, Humphreys. I *must* remain in London one more day. You go down to-morrow; I shall come by the first train next morning. Molyneux and the others won't be leaving for some days."

"Very well, sir; good-night, sir."

Brand returned into the room, and threw himself into an easy-chair; his only companion now was his old friend Evelyn.

The younger man regarded him.

"I can tell the whole story, Brand; I have been reading it in your face. You were troubled and perplexed before you got that letter. It gave some hope. Off you went to see Natalie; you came back with something in your manner that told me you had seen her and had been received favorably. Now it is only one more day of happiness you hunger for, before going up to the hard work of the North. Well, I don't wonder. But, at the same time, you look a little too restless and anxious for a man who has just won such a beautiful sweetheart."

"I am not so lucky as that, Evelyn," said he, absently.

"What, you did not see her?"

"Oh yes, I saw her; and I hope. But of course one craves for some full assurance when such a prize is within reach; and—and I suppose one's nerves are a little excited, so that you imagine possibilities and dangers—"

He rose, and took a turn up and down the room.

"It is the old story, Evelyn. I distrust Lind."

"What has that to do with it?"

"As you say, what has that to do with it? If I had Natalie's full promise, I should care for nothing. She is a woman; she is not a school girl, to be frightened. If I had only that, I should start off for the North with a light heart."

"Why not secure it, then?"

"Perhaps it is scarcely fair to force myself on her at present until her father returns. Then she will be more her own mistress. But the doubt—I don't know when I may be back from the North—" At last he stopped short. "Yes, I will see her to-morrow at all hazards."

By-and-by he began to tell his friend of the gay-hearted old albino he had encountered at Lind's house; though in the mean time he reserved to himself the secret of Natalie's mother being alive.

"Lind must have an extraordinary faculty," he said at length, "of inspiring fear, and of getting people to obey him."

"He does not look a ferocious person," Lord Evelyn said, with a smile. "I have always found him very courteous and pleasant—frank, amiable, and all the rest of it."

"And yet here is this man Calabressa, an old friend of his; and he talks of Lind with a sort of mysterious awe. He is not a man whom you must think of thwarting. He is the Invulnerable, the Implacable. The fact is, I was inclined to laugh at my good friend Calabressa; but all the same, it was quite apparent that the effect Lind had produced on his mind was real enough."

"Well, you know," said Lord Evelyn, "Lind has a great organization to control, and he must be a strict disciplinarian. It is the object of his life; everything else is of minor importance. Even you confess that you admire his tremendous power of work."

"Yes, I do. I admire his administrative capacity; it is wonderful. But I don't believe for a moment that it was his mind that projected this big scheme. That must have been the work of an idealist, perhaps of a dozen of them, all adding and helping. I think he almost said as much to me one night. His business is to keep the machinery in working order, and he does it to perfection."

"There is one thing about him: he never forgets, and he never forgives. You remember the story of Count Verdt?"

"I have cause to remember it. I thought for a moment the wretch had committed suicide because I caught him cheating."

"I have been told that Lind played with that fellow like a cat with a mouse. Verdt got hints from time to time that his punishment as a traitor was overtaking him; and yet he was allowed to live on in constant fear. And it was the Camorra, and not Lind, or any of Lind's friends, who finished him after all."

"Well, that was implacable enough, to be sure; to have death dogging the poor wretch's heels, and yet refusing to strike."

"For myself, I don't pity him much," said Lord Evelyn, as he rose and buttoned his coat. "He was a fool to think he could play such a trick and escape the consequences."

Now, Brand, how am I to hear from you to-morrow? You know I am in a measure responsible."

"However it ends, I am grateful to you, Evelyn; you may be sure of that. I will write to you from Wolverhampton, and let you know the worst, or the best."

"The best, then: we will have no worsts."

He said good-bye, and went whistling cheerfully down the narrow oak staircase. He at least was not very apprehensive about the results of the next day's interview.

But how brief was this one day, with its rapidly passing opportunities; and then the stern necessity for departure and absence. He spent half the night in devising how best he could get speech of her, in a roundabout fashion, without the dread of the interference of friends. And at last he hit upon a plan which might not answer; but he could think of nothing else.

He went in the morning and secured a box at Covent Garden for that evening. Then he called at Lisle Street, and got Calabressa's address. He found Calabressa in his lodgings, shivering and miserable, for the day was wet, misty, and cold.

"You can escape from the gloom of our climate, Signor Calabressa," said he. "What do you say to going to the opera to-night?"

"Your opera?" said he, with a gesture indicative of still deeper despair. "You forget I come from the home, the nursery of opera."

"Yes," said Brand, good-naturedly. "Great singers train in your country, but they sing here: that is the difference. Do not be afraid; you will not be disappointed. See, I have brought you a box; and if you want companions, why not ask Miss Lind and Madame Potecki to go with you and show you the ways of our English opera-houses?"

"Ah, the little Natalushka!" said Calabressa, eagerly. "Will she go? Do you think she will go? *Ma foi*, it is not often I have the chance of taking such a beautiful creature to the opera, if she will go! What must I do?"

"You will have to go and beg her to be kind to you. Say you have the box—you need not mention how: ask if she will escort you, she and Madame Potecki. Say it is a kindness: she cannot help doing a kindness."

"There you are right, monsieur: do not I see it in her eyes? can I not hear it in her voice?"

"Well, that you must do at once, before she goes out for her walk at noon."

“To go out walking on a day like this?”

“She will go out, nevertheless; and you must go and intercept her, and pray her to do you this kindness.”

“*Après?*”

“You must come to me again, and we will get an English evening costume for you somehow. Then, two bouquets; I will get those for you, and send them to them to the box to await you.”

“But you yourself, monsieur; will you not be of the party?”

“Perhaps you had better say nothing about me, signore; for one is so busy nowadays. But if I come into the stalls; if I see you and the ladies in the box, then I shall permit myself to call upon you; do you understand?”

“Parfaitement,” said Calabressa, gravely. Then he laughed slightly. “Ah, monsieur, you English are not good diplomats. I perceive that you wish to say more; that you are afraid to say more; that you are anxious and a little bit demure, like a girl. What you wish is this, is it not: if I say to Madame Potecki, ‘Madame, I am a stranger; will you show me the promenade, that I may behold the costumes of the beautiful English ladies?’ madame answers, ‘Willingly.’ We go to see the costumes of the beautiful English ladies. Why should you come? You would not leave the young lady all alone in the box?”

“Calabressa,” he said, frankly, “I am going away to-morrow morning: do you understand that?”

Calabressa bowed gravely.

“To comprehend that is easy. Allons, let us play out the little plot for the amusement of that rogue of a Natalushka. And if she does not thank me—eh bien! perhaps her papa will: who knows?”

Before the overture began that evening, Brand was in his seat in the stalls; and he had scarcely sat down when he knew, rather than saw, that certain figures were coming into the box which he had been covertly watching. The opera was *Fidelio*—that beautiful story of a wife’s devotion and courage, and reward. As he sat and listened, he knew she was listening too; and he could almost have believed it was her own voice that was pleading so eloquently with the jailer to let the poor prisoner see the light of day for a few minutes in the garden. Would not that have been her prayer, too, in similar circumstances? Then Leonora, disguised as a youth, is forced to assist in the digging of her own husband’s grave. Pizarro enters; the unhappy prisoners are driven back to their

CHAPTER XXI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

WHEN Ferdinand Lind told Calabressa that Natalie had grown to be a woman, he no doubt meant what he said ; but he himself had not the least notion what the phrase implied. He could see, of course, that she had now a woman's years, stature, self-possession ; but, for all that, she was still to him only a child—only the dark-eyed, gentle, obedient little Natalushka, who used to be so proud when she was praised for her music, and whose only show of resolution was when she set to work on the grammar of a new language. Indeed, it is the commonest thing in the world for a son, or a daughter, or a friend to grow in years without those nearest them being aware of the fact, until some chance circumstance, some crisis, causes a revelation, and we are astounded at the change that time has insidiously made.

Such a discovery was now about to confront Ferdinand Lind. He was to learn not only that his daughter had left the days of her childhood behind her, but also that the womanhood to which she had attained was of a fine and firm character, a womanhood that rung true when tried. And this is how the discovery was forced on him :

On his arrival in London, Mr. Lind drove first to Lisle Street, to pick up letters on his way home. Beratinsky had little news about business matters to impart ; but, instead, he began—as Lind was looking at some of the envelopes—to drop hints about Brand. It was easy to see now, he said, why the rich Englishman was so eager to join them, and give up his life in that way. It was not for nothing. Mr. Lind would doubtless hear more at home ; and so forth.

Mr. Lind was thinking of other things ; but when he came to understand what these innuendoes meant, he was neither angry nor impatient. He had much toleration for human weakness, and he took it that Beratinsky was only a little off his head with jealousy. He was aware that it had been Beratinsky's ambition to become his son-in-law : a project that swiftly came to an end through the perfect unanimity of father and daughter on that point.

“ You are a fool, Beratinsky,” he said, as he tied the bundle of letters together. “ At your time of life you should not imagine that every one's head is full of philandering nonsense.

Mr. Brand has something else to think of ; besides, he has been in the midland counties all this time."

"Has he? Who, then, was taking your daughter to dinner-parties, to theatres—I don't know what?"

Lind dealt gently with this madness.

"Who told you?"

"I have eyes and ears."

"Put them to a better use, Beratinsky."

Then he left, and the hansom carried him along to Curzon Street. Natalie herself flew to the door when she heard the cab drive up: there she was to receive him, smiling a welcome, and so like her mother that he was almost startled. She caught his face in her two hands and kissed him.

"Ah, why did you not let me come to meet you at Liverpool?"

"There were too many with me, Natalie. I was busy. Now get Anneli to open my portmanteau, and you can find out for yourself all the things I have brought for you."

"I do not care for them, papa ; I like to have you yourself back."

"I suppose you were rather dull, Natalushka, being all by yourself?"

"Sometimes. But I will tell you all that has happened when you are having breakfast."

"I have had breakfast, child. Now I shall get through my letters, and you can tell me all that has happened afterward."

This was equivalent to a dismissal ; so Natalie went upstairs, leaving her father to go into the small study, where lay another bundle of letters for him.

Almost the first that he opened was from George Brand ; and to his amazement he found, not details about progress in the North, but a simple, straightforward, respectful demand to be permitted to claim the hand of Natalie in marriage. He did not conceal the fact that this proposal had already been made to Natalie herself ; he ventured to hope that it was not distasteful to her ; he would also hope that her father had no objections to urge. It was surely better that the future of a young girl in her position should be provided for. As regarded by himself, Mr. Lind's acquaintance with him was no doubt but recent and comparatively slight ; but if he wished any further and natural inquiry into the character of the man to whom he was asked to intrust his daughter, Lord Evelyn might be consulted as his closest friend. And a speedy answer was requested.

This letter was, on the whole, rather a calm and business-

perhaps you will get stout and rosy, like an English matron. But your old friends—you will have forgotten them."

"Never!—never!" she said, vehemently; and, despite herself, her eyes filled with tears.

"Then we will take Mr. Brand. The Buckinghamshire house is open again. An Englishman's house is his castle; there is a great deal of work in superintending it, its entertainments, its dependents. Perhaps he has a pack of fox-hounds; no doubt he is a justice of the peace, and the terror of poachers. But in the midst of all this hunting, and giving of dinner-parties, and shooting of pheasants, do you think he has much time or thought for the future of the millions of poor wretches all over Europe who once claimed his care? Not much! That was in his days of irresponsible bachelorhood. Now he is settled down—he is a country gentleman. The world can set itself right without him. He is anxious about the price of wheat."

"Ah, how you mistake him, papa!" said she, proudly. And there was a proud light on her face too as she rose and quickly went to a small escritoire close by. A few seconds sufficed her to write a short note, which she brought back to her father."

"There," said she, "I will abide by that test. If he says 'yes,' I will never see him again—never speak one word to him again."

Her father took the note and read it. It was as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am anxious about the future for both of us. If you will promise me, now and at once, to give up the work you are engaged in, I will be your wife, when and where you will.
NATALIE."

"Send it!" she said, proudly. "I am not afraid. If he says 'yes,' I will never see him again."

The challenge was not accepted. He tore the note in two and flung it into the grate.

"It is time to put an end to this folly," he said impatiently. "I have shown you what persistence in it would bring on yourself. You would be estranged from everything and every one you have hitherto been interested in; you would have to begin a new life, for which you are not fitted; you would be the means of doing our cause an irreparable injury. Yes, I say so frankly. The withdrawal of this man Brand, which would certainly follow, sooner or later, on his marriage, would be a great blow to us. We have need of his work:

we have still more need of his money. And it is you, you of all people in the world, who would be the means of taking him away from us !”

“But it is not so, papa,” she said in great distress. “Surely you do not think that I am begging to be allowed to become his wife? That is for him to decide; I will follow his wishes as far as I can—as far as you will allow me, papa. But this I know, that, so far from interfering with the work he has undertaken, it would only spur him on. Should I have thought of it otherwise? Ah, surely you know—you have said so to me yourself—he is not one to go back.”

“He is an Englishman; you do not understand Englishmen,” her father said; and then he added, firmly, “You are not to be deterred by what may happen to yourself. Well, consider what may happen to him. I tell you I will not have this risk run. George Brand is too valuable to us. If you or he persist in this folly, it will be necessary to provide against all contingencies by procuring his banishment.”

“Banishment!” she exclaimed, with a quick and frightened look.

“That may not sound much to you,” said her father, calmly, “for you have scarcely what may be called a native country. You have lived anywhere, everywhere. It is different with an Englishman, who has his birthplace, his family estate, his friends in England.”

“What do you mean, papa?” said she, in a low voice. She had not been frightened by the fancy picture he had drawn of her own future, but this ominous threat about her lover seemed full of menace.

“I say that, at all hazards,” Lind continued, looking at her from under the bushy eyebrows, “this folly must be brought to an end. It is not expedient that a marriage between you and Mr. Brand should even be thought of. You have both got other duties, inexorable duties. It is my business to see that nothing comes in the way of their fulfilment. Do you understand?”

She sat dumb now, with a vague fear about the future of her lover; for herself she had no fear.

• “Some one must be sent to Philadelphia, to remain there probably for his lifetime. Do not drive me to send George Brand.”

“Papa!” It was a cry of appeal; but he paid no heed. This matter he was determined to settle at once.

“Understand, this idle notion must be dropped; otherwise George Brand goes to the States forthwith, and remains

there. Fortunately, I don't suppose the matter has gone far enough to cause either of you any deep misery. This is not what one would call a madly impassioned letter."

She scarcely perceived the sneer; some great calamity had befallen her, of which she as yet scarcely knew the extent; she sat mute and bewildered—too bewildered to ask why all this thing should be.

"That may not seem much to you," he said, in the same cold, implacable way. "But banishment for life from his native country, his home, his friends, is something to an Englishman. And if we are likely to lose his work in this country through a piece of sentimental folly, we shall take care not to lose it in America."

She rose.

"Is that all, papa?"

She seemed too stunned to say any more.

He rose also, and took her hand.

"It is better to have a clear understanding, Natalie. Some might say that I object to your marrying because you are a help to me, and your going away would leave the house empty. Perhaps you may have some kind friend put that notion into your head. But that is not the reason why I speak firmly to you, why I show you you must dismiss this fancy of the moment—if you have entertained it as well as he—as impossible. I have larger interests at stake; I am bound to sacrifice every personal feeling to my duty. And I have shown you what would be the certain result of such a marriage; therefore, I say, such a marriage is not to be thought of. Come, now, Natalie, you claim to be a woman: be a woman! Something higher is wanted from you. What would all our friends think of you if you were to sink into a position like that—the house-keeper of a country squire?"

She said nothing; but she went away to her own room and sat down, her face pale, her heart like lead. And all her thought was of this possible doom hanging over him if he persisted; and she guessed, knowing something of him, whether he was likely to be dissuaded by a threat.

Then, for a second or so, a wild despairing fancy crossed her mind, and her fingers tightened, and the proud mouth grew firm. If it was through her that this penalty of banishment overtook him, why should she not do as others had done?

But no—that was impossible. She had not the courage to make such an offer. She could only sit and think; and the picture before her imagination was that of her lover sailing

away from his native land. She saw the ship getting farther and farther away from English shores, until it disappeared altogether in a mist of rain—and tears.

CHAPTER XXII.

EVASIONS.

IT was in Manchester, whither he had gone to meet the famous John Molyneux, that George Brand awoke on this dull and drizzly morning. The hotel was almost full. He had been sent to the top floor; and now the outlook from the window was dismal enough—some slated roofs, a red chimney or two, and farther off the higher floors of a lofty warehouse, in which the first signs of life were becoming visible. Early as it was, there was a dull roar of traffic in the distance; occasionally there was the scream of a railway whistle.

Neither the morning nor the prospect was conducive to a cheerful view of life; and perhaps that was why, when he took in his boots and found in one of them a letter, deposited there by the chamber-maid, which he at once saw was in Ferdinand Lind's handwriting, that he instantly assumed, mentally, an attitude of defiance. He did not open the letter just then. He took time to let his opposition harden. He knew there would be something or somebody to fight. It was too much to expect that everything should go smoothly. If there was such a thing as a law of compensation, that beautiful dream-like evening at the opera—the light, the color, the softened music; the scent of white-rose; the dark, soft eyes, and the last pressure of the hand; the forget-me-nots he carried away with him—would have to be paid for somehow. And he had always distrusted Ferdinand Lind. His instinct assured him that this letter, which he had been looking for and yet dreading, contained a distinct refusal.

His instinct was completely at fault. The letter was exceedingly kind and suave. Mr. Lind might try to arouse his daughter from this idle day-dream by sharp words and an ominous threat; he knew that it was otherwise he must deal with Mr. George Brand.

“My dear Mr. Brand,” he wrote, “as you may imagine, your letter has surprised me not a little, and pleased me too

for a father naturally is proud to see his daughter thought well of; and your proposal is very flattering; especially, I may add, as you have seen so little of Natalie. You are very kind—and bold, and unlike English nature—to take her and family on trust as it were; for are not your countrymen very particular as to the relatives of those they would marry with? and of Natalie's relatives and friends how many have you seen? Excuse me if I do not quite explain myself; for writing in English is not as familiar to me as to Natalie, who is quite an Englishwoman now. Very well; I think it is kind of you to think so highly of my daughter as to offer her to make her your wife, you knowing so little of her. But there you do not mistake; she is worthy to be the wife of any one. If she ever marries, I hope she will be as good a wife as she has been a daughter."

"If she ever marries!" This phrase sounded somewhat ominous; and yet, if he meant to say "No," why not say it at once? Brand hastily glanced over the letter, to find something definite; but he found that would not do. He began again, and read with deliberation. The letter had obviously been written with care.

"I have also to thank you, besides, for the very flattering proposal, for your care to put this matter before me at an early time. Regarding how little Natalie and you have seen each other, it is impossible that either her or your affection can be so serious that it is not fair to look on your proposal with some views as to expediency; and at an early time one can easily control one's wishes. I can answer for my daughter that she has always acted as I thought best for her happiness; and I am sure that now, or at any time, in whatever emergency, she would far prefer to have the decision rest with me, rather than take the responsibility on herself."

When George Brand came to this passage he read it over again; and his comment was, "My good friend, don't be too sure of that. It is possible that you have lived nineteen years with your daughter to very little purpose, so far as your knowledge of her character is concerned."

"Well, then, my dear sir," the letter proceeded, "all this being in such a way, might I ask you to reflect again over your proposal, and examine it from the view of expediency? You and I are not free agents, just to please ourselves when we like. Perhaps I was wrong in my first objection to your very flattering proposal; I believed you might, in marrying her, withdraw from the work we are all engaged in; I feared this as a great calamity—an injury done to many to gratify

the fancy of one. But Natalie, I will confess, scorned me for that doubt; and, indeed, was so foolish as to propose a little hoax, to prove to me that, even if she promised to marry you as a reward, she could not get you to abandon our cause. 'No, no,' she said; 'that is not to be feared. He is not one to go back.'"

When George Brand read these words his breath came and went a little quickly. She should not find her faith in him misplaced.

"That is very well, very satisfactory, I said to her. We cannot afford to lose you, whatever happens. To return; there are more questions of expediency. For example, how can one tell what may be demanded of one? Would it be wise for you to be hampered with a wife when you know not where you may have to go? Again, would not the cares of a household seriously interfere with your true devotion to your labors? You are so happily placed! You are free from responsibilities: why increase them? At present Natalie is in a natural and comfortable position; she has grown accustomed to it; she is proud to know that she can be of assistance to us; her life is not an unhappy one. But consider—a young wife, separated from her husband perhaps by the Atlantic: in a new home, with new duties; anxious, terrified with apprehensions: surely that is not the change you would wish to see?"

For a second Brand was almost frightened by this picture, and a pang of remorse flashed through his heart. But then his common-sense reasserted itself. Why the Atlantic? Why should they be separated? Why should she be terrified with apprehensions?

"As regards her future," her father continued, "I am not an old man; and if anything were to happen to me, she has friends. Nor will I say to you a word about myself, or my claim on her society and help; for parents have not the right to sacrifice the happiness of their children to their own convenience; it is so fortunate when they find, however, that there is no disposition on the part of the young to break those ties that have been formed by the companionship of many years. It is this, my dear friend and colleague, that makes me thank you for having spoken so early; that I ask you to reconsider, and that I can advise my daughter, without the fear that I am acting in a tyrannical manner or thwarting any serious affection on her part. You will perceive I do not dictate. I ask you to think over whether it is wise for your own happiness—whether it would improve Natalie's probabilities of

happiness—whether it would interfere in some measure with the work you have undertaken—if you continue to cherish this fancy, and let it grow on you. Surely it is better for a man to have but one purpose in life. Nevertheless, I am open to conviction.

“That reminds me that there is another matter on which I should like to say a few words to you when there is the chance. If there is a break in the current of your present negotiations, shall you have time to run up to London? Only this: you will, I trust, not seek to see Natalie, or to write to her, until we have come to an understanding. Again I thank you for having spoken to me so early, before any mischief can have been done. Think over what I have said, my dear friend; and remember, above all things, where your chief duty lies.

“Yours sincerely, FERDINAND LIND.”

He read this letter over two or three times, and the more he read it the more he was impressed with the vexatious conviction that it would be an uncommonly difficult thing to answer it. It was so reasonable, so sensible, so plausible. Then his old suspicions returned. Why was this man Lind so plausible? If he objected, why did he not say so outright? All these specious arguments: how was one to turn and twist, evading some, meeting others; and all the time taking it for granted that the happiness of two people's lives was to be dependent on such logic-chopping as could be put down on a sheet of paper?

Then he grew impatient. He would not answer the letter at all. Lind did not understand. The matter had got far ahead of this clever argumentation; he would appeal to Natalie herself; it was her “Yes” or “No” that would be final; not any contest and balancing of words. There were others he could recall, of more importance to him. He could almost hear them now in the trembling, low voice: “*I will be your wife, or the wife of no one. Dear friend, I can say no more.*” And again, when she gave him the forget-me-nots, “*Whatever happens, you will remember that there was one who at least wished to be worthy of your love.*” He could remember the proud, brave look; again he felt the trembling of the hand that timidly sought his for an instant; he could almost scent the white-rose again, and hear the murmur of the people in the corridor. And this was the woman, into whose eyes he had looked as if they were the eyes of his wife, who was to be taken away from him by means of a couple of sheets of note-paper all covered over with little specious suggestions.

He thrust the letter into a pocket, and hurriedly proceeded with his dressing, for he had a breakfast appointment. Indeed, before he was ready, the porter came up and said that a gentleman had called for him, and was waiting for him in the coffee-room.

"Ask him what he will have for breakfast, and let him go on. I shall be down presently."

When Brand did at length go down, he found that his visitor had frankly accepted this permission, and had before him a large plate of corned-beef, with a goodly tankard of beer. Mr. John Molyneux, although he was a great authority among English workmen generally, and especially among the trades-unionists of the North, had little about him of the appearance of the sleek-haired demagogue as that person is usually represented to us. He was a stout, yeoman-looking man, with a frosty-red face and short silver-white whiskers; he had keen, shrewd blue eyes, and a hand that gave a firm grip. The fact is, that Molyneux had in early life been a farmer, and a well-to-do-farmer. But he had got smitten with the writings of Cobbett, and he began to write too. Then he took to lecturing—on the land laws, on Robert Owenism, on the Church of England, but more especially on co-operation. Finding, however, that all this pamphleteering and lecturing was playing ducks and drakes with his farming, and being in many respects a shrewd and sensible person, he resolved on selling out of his farm and investing the proceeds in the government stock of America, the country of his deepest admiration. In the end he found that he had about one hundred and fifty pounds a year, on which he could live very comfortably, while giving up all his time and attention to his energetic propagandism. This was the person who now gave Brand a hearty greeting, and then took a long draught at the tankard of ale.

"You see, Mr. Brand," said he, looking cautiously around, and then giving a sly wink. "I thought we might have a chat by ourselves in this corner."

Brand nodded; there was no one near them.

"Now I have been considering about what you told me; and last night I called on Professor —, of Owens College, ye know, and I had some further talk with him. Well, sir, it's a grand scheme—splendid; and I don't wonder you've made such progress as I hear of. And when all the lads are going in for it, what would they say if old John Molyneux kept out, eh?"

"Why, they would say he had lost some of his old pluck;

that's about what they would say, isn't it?" said Brand; though the fact was that he was thinking a good deal more about the letter in his pocket.

"There was one point, though, Mr. Brand, that I did not put before either Professor——or yourself, and it is important. The point is, dibs."

"I beg your pardon," said Brand, absently; he was, in truth, recalling the various phrases and sentences in that letter of Ferdinand Lind.

"Dibs, sir—dibs," said the farmer-agitator, energetically. "You know what makes the mare go. And you know these are not the best of times; and some of the lads will be thinking they pay enough into their own Union. That's what I want to know, Mr. Brand, before I can advise any one. You need money; how do you get it? What's the damage on joining, and after?"

Brand pulled himself together.

"Oh, money?" said he. "That need not trouble you. We exact nothing. How could we ask people to buy a pig in a poke? There's not a working-man in the country but would put us down as having invented an ingenious scheme for living on other people's earnings. It is not money we want; it is men."

"Yes, yes," said Molyneux, looking rather puzzled. "But when you've got the machine, you want oil, eh? The basis of everything, sir, is dibs: what can ye do without it?"

"We want money, certainly," Brand said. "But we do not touch a farthing that is not volunteered. There are no compulsory subscriptions. We take it that the more a man sees of what we are doing, and of what has to be done, the more he will be willing to give according to his means; and so far there has been no disappointment."

"H'm!" said Molyneux, doubtfully. "I reckon you won't get much from our chaps."

"You don't know. It is wonderful what a touch of enthusiasm will do—and emulation between the local centers. Besides, we are always having ascensions of richer folk, and these are expected to make up all deficiencies."

"Ah!" said the other. "I see more daylight that way. Now you, Mr. Brand, must have been a good fat prize for them, eh?"

The shrewd inquiring glance that accompanied this remark set George Brand laughing.

"I see, Mr. Molyneux, you want to get at the 'dibs' of every-

thing. Well, I can't enlighten you any further until you join us : you have not said whether you will or not."

"I will!" said the other, bringing his fist down on the table, though he still spoke in a loud whisper. "I'm your man! In for a penny, in for a pound!"

"I beg your pardon," said Brand, politely, "but you are in for neither, unless you like. You may be in for a good deal of work, though. You must bring us men, and you will be let off both the penny and the pound. Now, could you run up with me to London to-night, and be admitted to-morrow, and get to know something of what we are doing?"

"Is it necessary?"

"In your case, yes. We want to make you a person of importance."

So at last Molyneux agreed, and they started for London in the evening; the big, shrew, farmer-looking man being as pleased as a child to have certain signs and passwords confided to him. Brand made light of these things—and, in fact, they were only such as were used among the outsiders; but Molyneux was keenly interested, and already pictured himself going through Europe and holding this subtle conversation with all the unknown companions whom chance might throw in his way.

But long ere he reached London the motion of the train had sent him to sleep; and George Brand had plenty of time to think over that letter, and to guess at what possible intention might lie under its plausible phrases. He had leisure to think of other things, too. The question of money, for example—about which Molyneux had been so curious with regard to this association—was one on which he himself was but slightly informed, the treasury department being altogether outside his sphere. He did not even know whether Lind had private means, or was enabled to live as he did by the association, for its own ends. He knew that the Society had numerous paid agents; no doubt, he himself could have claimed a salary, had it been worth his while. But the truth is that "dibs" concerned him very little. He had never been extravagant; he had always lived well within his income; and his chief satisfaction in being possessed of a liberal fortune lay in the fact that he had not to bother his head about money. There was one worry the less in life.

But then George Brand had been a good deal about the world, and had seen something of human life, and knew very well the power the possession of money gives. Why, this very indifference, this happy carelessness about pecuniary de-

tails, was but the consequence of his having a large fund in the background that he could draw on at will. If he did not overvalue his fortune, on the other hand he did not undervalue it; and he was about the last man in the world who could reasonably have been expected to part with it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TALISMAN.

NATALIE LIND was busy writing at the window of the drawing-room in Curzon Street when Calabressa entered, unannounced. He had outstripped the little Anneli; perhaps he was afraid of being refused. He was much excited.

"Forgive me, signorina, if I startle you," he said, rapidly, in his native tongue; "forgive me, little daughter. We go away to-night, I and the man Kirski, whom you saved from madness: we are ordered away; it is possible I may never see you again. Now listen."

He took a seat beside her; in his hurry and eagerness he had for the moment abandoned his airy manner.

"When I came here I expected to see you a school-girl—some one in safe-keeping—with no troubles to think of. You are a woman; you may have trouble; and it is I, Calabressa, who would then cut off my right hand to help you. I said I would leave you my address; I cannot. I dare not tell any one even where I am going. What of that? Look well at this card."

He placed before her a small bit of pasteboard, with some lines marked on it.

"Now we will imagine that some day you are in great trouble; you know not what to do; and you suddenly, bethink yourself, 'Now it is Calabressa, and the friends of Calabressa, who must help me—'"

"Pardon me, signore," said Natalie, gently. "To whom should I go but to my father, if I were in trouble? And why should one anticipate trouble? If it were to come, perhaps one might be able to brave it."

"My little daughter, you vex me. You must listen. If no trouble comes, well! If it does, are you any the worse for knowing that there are many on whom you can rely? Very well; look! This is the Via Roma in Naples."

"I know it," said Natalie: why should she not humor the

good-natured old albino, who had been a friend of her mother's?

"You go along it until you come to this little lane; it is the Vico Carlo; you ascend the lane—here is the first turning—you go round, and behold! the entrance to a court. The court is dark, but there is a lamp burning all day; go farther in, there are wine-vaults. You enter the wine-vaults, and say, 'Bartolotti.' You do not say, 'Is Signor Bartolotti at home?' or, 'Can I see the illustrious Signor Bartolotti,' but 'Bartolotti,' clear and short. You understand?"

"You give yourself too much trouble, signore."

"I hope so, little daughter. I hope you will never have to search for these wine-vaults; but who knows? *Alors*, one comes to you, and says, 'What is your pleasure, signorina?' Then you ask, 'Where is Calabressa?' The answer to that? It may be, 'We do not know;' or it may be, 'Calabressa is in prison again,' or it may be, 'Calabressa is dead.' Never mind. When Calabressa dies, no one will care less than Calabressa himself."

"Some one would care, signore; you have a mother."

He took her hand.

"And a daughter, too," he said, lightly; "if the wicked little minx would only listen. Then you know what you must say to the man whom you will see at the wine-vaults; you must say this, 'Brother, I come with a message from Calabressa; it is the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi who demands your help.' Then do you know what will happen? From the next morning you will be under the protection of the greatest power in Europe; a power unknown but invincible; a power that no one dares to disobey. Ah, little one, you will find out what the friends of Calabressa can do for you when you appeal to them!"

He smiled proudly.

"*Allons!* Put this card away in a secret place. Do not show it to any one; let no one know the name I confided to you. Can you remember it, little daughter?"

"Bartolotti."

"Good! Now that is one point settled; here is the next. You do not seem to have any portrait of your mother, my little one?"

"Ah, no!" she exclaimed, quickly; for she was more interested now. "I suppose my father could not bear to be reminded of his loss: if there is any portrait, I have not seen it; and how could I ask him?"

He regarded her for a moment, and then he spoke more slowly than hitherto :

" Little Natalushka, I told you I am going away ; and who knows what may happen to me ? I have no money or land to leave to any one ; if I had a wife and children, the only name I could leave them would be the name of a jailbird. If I were to leave a will behind me, it would read, ' My heart to my beloved Italia ; my curse to Austria ; and my—' Ah, yes, after all I have something to leave to the little Natalushka."

He put his hand, which trembled somewhat, into the breast of his coat, and brought out a small leather case.

" I am about to give you my greatest treasure, little one ; my only treasure. I think you will value it."

He opened the case and handed it to her ; inside there was a miniature, painted on ivory ; it might have been a portrait of Natalie herself. For some time the girl did not say a word, but her eyes slowly filled with tears.

" She was very beautiful signore," she murmured.

" Ah little daughter," he said, cheerfully, " I am glad to see the portrait in safe-keeping at last. Many a risk I have run with it ; many a time I have had to hide it. And you must hide it too ; let no one see it but yourself. But now you will give me one of your own in exchange, my little one ; and so the bargain is complete."

She went to the small table adjoining to hunt among the photographs.

" And lastly, one more point, Signorina Natalushka," said Calabressa, with the air of one who had got through some difficult work. " You asked me once to find out for you who was the lady from whom you received the little silver locket. Well, you see, that is now out of my power. I am going away. If you are still curious, you must ask some one else ; but is it not natural to suppose that the locket may have been stolen a great many years ago, and at last the thief resolves to restore it ? No matter ; it is only a locket."

She returned with a few photographs for him to choose from. He picked out two.

" There is one for me ; there is one for my old mother. I will say to her, ' Do you remember the young Hungarian lady who came to see you at Spezia ? Put on your spectacles now, and see whether that is not the same young lady. Ah, good old mother ; can you see no better than that ?—that is not Natalie Berezylyi at all ; that is her daughter, who lives in England. But she has not got the English way ; she is not content when she herself is comfortable ; she thinks of others ;

she has an ear for voices afar off.' That is what I shall say to the old mother."

He put the photographs in his pocket.

"In the mean time, my little daughter," said he, "now that our pressing business is over, one may speak at leisure: and what of you, now? My sight is not very good; but even my eyes can see that you are not looking cheerful enough. You are troubled, Natalushka, or you would not have forgotten to thank me for giving you the only treasure I have in the world."

The girl's pale face flushed, and she said, quickly,

"There are some things that are not to be expressed in words, Signor Calabressa. I cannot tell you what I think of your kindness to me."

"Silence! do you not understand my joking? *Eh, bien*; let us understand each other. Your father has spoken to me—a little, not much. He would rather have an end to the love affair, *n'est ce pas?*"

"There are some other things that are not to be spoken of," the girl said, in a low voice, but somewhat proudly.

"Natalushka, I will not have you answer me like that. It is not right. If you knew all my history, perhaps you would understand why I ask you questions—why I interfere—why you think me impertinent—"

"Oh no, signore; how can I think that?"

She had her mother's portrait in her hand; she was gazing into the face that was so strangely like her own.

"Then why not answer me?"

She looked up with a quick, almost despairing look.

"Because I try not to think about it," she said, hurriedly.

"Because I try to think only of my work. And now, Signor Calabressa, you have given me something else to think about; something to be my companion when I am alone; and from my heart I thank you."

"But you speak as if you were in great grief, my little one. It is not all over between you and your lover?"

"How can I tell? What can I say?" she exclaimed; and for a moment her eyes looked up with the appealing look of a child. "He does not write to me. I may not write to him. I must not see him."

"But then there may be reasons for delay and consideration, little Natalushka; your father may have reasons. And your father did not speak to me as if it were altogether impossible. What he said was, in effect, 'We will see—we will see.' However, let us return to the important point: it

is my advice to you—you cannot have forgotten it—that whatever happens, whatever you may think, do not, little one, seek to go against your father's wishes. You will promise me that?"

"I have not forgotten, signore; but do you not remember my answer? I am no longer a child. If I am to obey, I must have reasons for obeying."

"What?" said he smiling. "And you know that one of our chief principles is that obedience is a virtue in itself?"

"I do not belong to your association, Signor Calabressa."

"The little rebel!"

"No, no, signore; do not drive me into a false position. I cannot understand my father, who has always been so kind to me; it is better not to speak of it: some day, when you come back, Signore Calabressa, you will find it all a forgotten story. Some people forget so readily; do they not?"

The trace of pathetic bitterness in her speech did not escape him.

"My child," said he, "you are suffering; I perceive it. But it may soon be over, and your joy will be all the greater. If not, if the future has trouble for you, remember what I have told you. *Allons donc!* Keep up a brave heart; but I need not say that to the child of the Berezolyis."

He rose, and at the same moment a bell was heard below.

"You are not going, Signore Calabressa? That must be my father."

"Your father!" he exclaimed; and he seemed confused. Then he added, quickly, "Ah, very well. I will see him as I go down. Our business, little one, is finished; is it not? Now repeat to me the name I mentioned to you."

"Bartolotti?"

"Excellent, excellent! And you will keep the portrait from every one's eyes but your own. Now, farewell!"

He took her two hands in his.

"My beautiful child," said he, in rather a trembling voice, "may Heaven keep you as true and brave as your mother was, and send you more happiness. I may not see England again—no, it is not likely; but in after-years you may sometimes think of old Calabressa, and remember that he loved you almost as he once loved another of your name."

Surely she must have understood. He hurriedly kissed her on the forehead, and said, "Adieu, little daughter!" and left. And when he had gone she sunk into the chair again, and clasped both her hands round her mother's portrait and burst into tears.

Calabressa made his way down-stairs, and, at the foot, ran against Ferdinand Lind.

"Ah, amico mio," said he, in his gay manner. "See now, we have been bidding our adieux to the little Natalushka—the rogue, to pretend to me she had no sweetheart! Shall we have a glass of wine, *mon capitaine*, before we embark?"

"Yes, yes," said Lind, though without any great cordiality. "Come into my little room."

He led him into the small study, and presently there was wine upon the table. Calabressa was exceedingly vivacious, and a little difficult to follow, especially in his French. But Lind allowed him to rattle on, until by accident he referred to some meeting that was shortly to take place at Posilipo.

"Well, now, Calabressa," said Lind, with apparent carelessness, as he broke off a bit of biscuit and poured out a glass of wine for himself, "I suppose you know more about the opinions of the Council now than any one not absolutely within itself."

"I am a humble servant only, friend Lind," he remarked, as he thrust his fingers into the breast of his military-looking coat—"a humble servant of my most noble masters. But sometimes one hears—one guesses—*mais a quel propos cette question, monsieur mon camarade?*"

Lind regarded him; and said, slowly,

"You know, Calabressa, that some seventeen years ago I was on the point of being elected a member of the Council."

"I know it," said the other, with a little embarrassment.

"You know why—though you do not know the right or the wrong of it—all that became impossible."

Calabressa nodded. It was delicate ground, and he was afraid to speak.

"Well," said Lind, "I ask you boldly—do you not think I have done enough in these sixteen or seventeen years to reinstate myself? Who else has done a tithe of the work I have done?"

"Friend Lind, I think that is well understood at head-quarters."

"Very well, then, Calabressa, what do you think? Consider what I have done; consider what I have now to do—what I may yet do. There is this Zaccatelli business. I do not approve of it myself. I think it is a mistake, as far as England is concerned. The English will not hear of assassination, even though it is such a criminal as the *cardinale*

affamatore who is to be punished. But though I do not approve, I obey. Some one from the English section will fulfil that duty : it is something to be considered. Then money ; think of the money I have contributed. Without English money what would have been done ? when there is any new levy wanted, it is to England—to me—they apply first ; and at the present moment their cry for money is more urgent than ever. Very well, then, my Calabressa ; what do you think of all this ? ”

Calabressa seemed somewhat embarrassed.

“ Friend Lind, I am not so far into their secrets as that. Being in prison so long, one loses terms of familiarity with many of one’s old associates, you perceive. But your claims are undoubted, my friend ; yes, yes, undoubted.”

“ But what do you think, Calabressa ? ” he said ; and that affectation of carelessness had now gone : there was an eager look in the deep-set eyes under the bushy eyebrows. “ What do you yourself think of my chance ? It ought to be no chance ; it ought to be a certainty. It is my due. I claim it as the reward of my sixteen years’ work, to say nothing of what went before.”

“ *Ah, naturellement, sans doute, tu as raison, mon camarade,* ” said the politic Calabressa, endeavoring to get out of the difficulty with a shrug of his shoulders. “ But—but—the more one knows of the Council the more one fears prying into its secrets. No, no ; I do what I am told ; for the rest my ears are closed.”

“ If I were on the Council, Calabressa,” said Lind, slowly, “ you would be treated with more consideration. You have earned as much.”

“ A thousand thanks, friend Lind,” said the other ; “ but I have no more ambitions now. The time for that is past. Let them make what they can out of old Calabressa—a stick to beat a dog with ; as long as I have my liberty and a cigarette, I am content.”

“ Ah, well,” said Lind, resuming his careless air, “ you must not imagine I am seriously troubled because the Council have not as yet seen fit to think of what I have done for them. I am their obedient servant, like yourself. Some day, perhaps, I may be summoned.”

“ *A la bonne heure !* ” said Calabressa, rising. “ No, no more wine. Your port-wine here is glorious—it is a wine for the gods ; but a very little is enough for a man. So, farewell, my good friend Lind. Be kind to the beautiful Natalushka,

if that other thing that I spoke of is impossible. If the bounty of Heaven had only given me such a daughter !”

“Kirski will meet you at the station,” said Lind. “Charing Cross, you remember ; eight sharp. The train is 8.25.”

“I will be there.”

They shook hands and parted ; the door was shut. Then, in the street outside, Calabressa glanced up at the drawing-room windows just for a second.

“Ah, little daughter,” he said to himself as he turned away, “you do not know the power of the talisman I have given you. But you will not use it. You will be happy ; you will marry the Englishman ; you will have little children round your knee ; and you will lead so busy and glad a life, year after year, that you will never have a minute to sit down and think of old Calabressa, or of the stupid little map of Naples he left with you.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ALTERNATIVE.

ONCE again the same great city held these two. When George Brand looked out in the morning on the broad river, and the bridges, and the hurrying cabs and trains and steamers, he knew that this flood of dusky sunshine was falling also on the quieter ways of Hyde Park and semi-silent thoroughfares adjoining. They were in the same city, but they were far apart. An invisible barrier separated them. It was not to Curzon Street that he directed his steps when he went out into the still, close air and the misty sunlight.

It was to Lisle Street that he walked ; and all the way he was persuading himself to follow Calabressa’s advice. He would betray no impatience, however specious Lind might be. He would shut down that distrust of Natalie’s father that was continually springing up in his mind. He would be considerate to the difficulties of his position, ready to admit the reasonableness of his arguments, mindful of the higher duties demanded of himself. But then—but then—he bethought him of that evening at the theatre ; he remembered what she had said ; how she had looked. He was not going to give up his beautiful, proud-natured sweetheart as a mere matter of expediency, as the conclusion of a clever bit of argument.

When he entered Mr. Lind’s room he found Heinrich Reitzei its sole occupant. Lind had not yet arrived ; the pal-

lid-faced young man with the *pince-nez* was in possession of his chair. And no sooner had George Brand made his appearance than Reitzei rose, and, with a significant smile, motioned the new-comer to take the vacant seat he had just quitted.

"What do you mean?" Brand said, naturally taking another chair, which was much nearer him.

"Will you not soon be occupying this seat *en permanence*?" Reitzei said, with affected nonchalance.

"Lind has abdicated, then, I presume," said Brand, coldly: this young man's manner had never been very grateful to him.

Reitzei sunk into the seat again, and twirled at his little black waxed mustache.

"Abdicated? No; not yet," he said with an air of indifference. "But if one were to be translated to a higher sphere?—there is a vacancy in the Council."

"Then he would have to live abroad," said Brand, quickly.

The younger man did not fail to observe this eagerness, and no doubt attributed it to a wrong cause. It was no sudden hope of succeeding to Lind's position that prompted the exclamation; it was the possibility of Natalie being carried away from England.

"He would have to live in the place called nowhere," said Reitzei, with a calm smile. "He would have to live in the dark—in the middle of the night—everywhere and nowhere at the same moment."

Brand was on the point of asking what would then become of Natalie, but he forbore. He changed the subject altogether.

"How is that mad Russian fellow getting on—Kirski? Still working?"

"Yes; at another kind of work. Calabressa has undertaken to turn his vehemence into a proper channel—to let off the steam, as it were, in another direction."

"Calabressa?"

"Kirski has become the humble disciple of Calabressa, and has gone to Genoa with him."

"What folly is this!" Brand said. "Have you admitted that maniac?"

"Certainly; such force was not to be wasted."

"A pretty disciple! How much Russian does Calabressa know?"

"Gathorne Edwards is with them; it is some special business. Both Calabressa and Kirski will be capital linguists before it is over."

"But how has Edwards got leave again from the British Museum?"

Reitzei shrugged his shoulders.

"I believe Lind wants to buy him over altogether. We could pay him more than the British Museum."

At this moment there was a sound outside of some one ascending the stair, and directly afterward Mr. Lind entered the room. As he came in Reitzei left.

"How do you do, Mr. Brand?" Lind said, shaking his visitor's hand with great warmth. "Very glad to see you looking so well; hard work does not hurt you, clearly. I hope I have not incommoded you in asking you to run up to London?"

"Not at all," Brand said. "Molyneux came up with me last night."

"Ah! You have gained him over?"

"Quite."

"Again I congratulate you. Well, now, since we have begun upon business, let us continue upon business."

He settled himself in his chair, as if for some serious talk. Brand could not help being struck by the brisk, vivacious, energetic look of this man; and on this morning he was even more than usually smartly dressed. Was it his daughter who had put that flower in his button-hole?

"I will speak frankly to you, and as clear as I can in my poor English. You must let me say, without flattery, that we are all very indebted to you—very proud of you; we are glad to have you with us. And now that you see farther and farther about our work, I trust you are not disappointed. You understand at the outset you must take so much on trust."

"I am not in the least disappointed; quite the reverse," Brand said; and he remembered Calabressa, and spoke in as friendly a way as possible. "Indeed, many a time I am sorry one cannot explain more fully to those who are only inquiring. If they could only see at once all that is going on, they would have no more doubt. And it is slow work with some of them."

"Yes, certainly; no doubt. Well, to return, if you please: it is a satisfaction you are not disappointed; that you believe we are doing a good work; that you go with us. Very well. You have advanced grade by grade; you see nothing to repent of; why not take the final step?"

"I don't quite understand you," he said, doubtfully.

"I will explain. You have given yourself to us—your time,

your labor, your future ; but the final step of self-sacrifice—is it so very difficult ? In many cases it is merely a challenge : we say, ‘ Show that you can trust us even for your very livelihood. Become absolutely dependent on us, even for your food, your drink, your clothes.’ In your case, I admit, it is something more : it is an invitation to a very considerable self-sacrifice. All the more proof that you are not afraid.”

“ I do not think I am afraid,” said Brand, slowly ; “ but—”

“ One moment. The affair is simple. The officers of our society—those who govern—those from whom are chosen the members of the Council—that Council that is more powerful than any government in Europe—those officers, I say, are required first of all to surrender every farthing of personal property, so that they shall become absolutely dependent on the Society itself—”

Brand looked a trifle bewildered : more than that, resentful and indignant, as if his common-sense had received a shock.

“ It is a necessary condition,” Lind continued, without eagerness—rather as if he were merely enunciating a theory. “ It insures absolute equality ; it is a proof of faith. And you may perceive that, as I am alive, they do not allow one to starve.”

The slight smile that accompanied this remark was meant to be reassuring. Certainly, Mr. Lind did not starve ; if the society of which he was a member enabled him to live as he did in Curzon Street, he had little to complain of.

“ You mean,” said George Brand, “ that before I enter this highest grade, next to the Council, I must absolutely surrender my entire fortune to you ? ”

“ To the common fund of the Society—yes,” was the reply ; uttered as a matter of course.

“ But there is no compulsion ? ”

“ Certainly not. On this point every one is free. You may remain in your present grade if you please.”

“ Then I confess to you I don’t see why I should change,” Brand said, frankly. “ Cannot I work as well for you just as I am ? ”

“ Perhaps ; perhaps not,” said the other, easily. “ But you perceive, further, that the fact of our not exacting subscriptions from the poorer members of our association makes it all the more necessary that we should have voluntary gifts from the richer. And as regards a surplus of wealth, of what use is that to any one ? Am I not granted as much money as one need reasonably want ? And just now there

is more than ever a need of money for the general purposes of the Society : Lord Evelyn gave us a thousand pounds last week."

Brand flushed red.

"I wish you had told me," he said ; "I would rather have given you five thousand. You know he cannot afford it."

"The greater the merit of the sacrifice," said his companion calmly.

This proposal was so audacious that George Brand was still a little bewildered ; but the fact was that, while listening very respectfully to Mr. Lind, he had been thinking more about Natalie ; and it was the most natural thing in the world that some thought of her should now intervene.

"Another thing, Mr. Lind," said he, though he was rather embarrassed. "Even if I were to make such a sacrifice, as far as I am concerned ; if I were to run the risk for myself alone, that might all be very well ; but supposing I were to marry, do you think I should like my wife to run such a risk—do you think I should be justified in allowing her ? And surely *you* ought not to ask *me*. It is your own daughter—

"Excuse me, Mr. Brand," said the other, blandly but firmly. "We will restrict ourselves to business at the present moment, if you will be so kind. I wrote to you all that occurred to me when I had to consider your very flattering proposal with regard to my daughter ; I may now add that, if any thought of her interfered with your decision in this matter, I should still further regret that you had ever met."

"You do not take the view a father would naturally take about the future of his own daughter," said Brand, bluntly.

Lind was not in the least moved by this taunt.

"I should allow neither the interests of my daughter nor my own interests to interfere with my sense of duty," said he. "Do you know me so little ? Do you know her so little ? Ah, then you have much to learn of her !"

Lind looked at him for a second or two, and added, with a slight smile,

"If you decide to say no, be sure I will not say a word of it to her. No ; I will still leave the child her hero in her imagination. For when I said to her, 'Natalie, an Englishman will do a good deal for the good of the people—he will give you his sympathy, his advice, his time, his labor—but he will not put his hand in his pocket ;' then she said, 'Ah, but you do not understand Mr. Brand yet, papa ; he is with us ; he is not one to go back.'"

"But this abandonment of one's property is so disproportionate in different cases—"

"The greater the sacrifice, the greater the merit," returned the other: then he immediately added, "But do not imagine I am seeking to persuade you. I place before you the condition on which you may go forward and attain the highest rank, ultimately perhaps the greatest power, in this organization. Ah, you do not understand what that is as yet. If you knew, you would not hesitate very long, I think."

"But—but suppose I have no great ambition," Brand remonstrated. "Suppose I am quite content to go on doing what I can in my present sphere?"

"You have already sworn to do your utmost in every direction. On this one point of money, however, the various Councils have never departed from the principle that there must be no compulsion. On any other point the Council orders; you obey. On this point the voluntary sacrifice has, as I say, all the more merit; and it is not forgotten. For what are you doing? You are yielding up a superabundance that you cannot use, so that thousands and thousands of the poor throughout the world may not be called on to contribute their pence. You are giving the final proof of your devotion. You are taking the vow of poverty and dependence, which many of the noblest brotherhoods the world has seen have exacted from their members at the very outset; but in your case with the difference that you can absolutely trust to the resources of an immense association—"

"Yes, as far as I am concerned," Brand said, quickly. "But I ask you whether I should be justified in throwing away this power to protect others. May I appeal to Natalie herself? May I ask her?"

"I am afraid, Mr. Brand," said the other, with the same mild firmness, "I must request you in the meantime to leave Natalie out of consideration altogether. This is a question of duty, of principle; it must regulate our future relations with each other; pray let it stand by itself."

Brand sat silent for a time. There were many things to think over. He recalled, for example, though vaguely, a conversation he had once had with Lord Evelyn, in which this very question of money was discussed, and in which he had said that he would above all things make sure he was not being duped. Moreover, he had intended that his property, in the event of his dying unmarried, should go to his nephews. But it was not his sister's boys who were now uppermost in his mind.

He rose.

"You cannot expect me to give you a definite answer at once," he said, almost absently.

"No; before you go, let me add this," said the other, regarding his companion with a watchful look: "the Council are not only in urgent need of liberal funds just now, but also, in several directions, of diligent and exceptional service. The money contribution which they demand from England I shall be able to meet somehow, no doubt; hitherto I have not failed them. The claim for service shall not find us wanting, either, I hope; and it has been represented to me that perhaps you ought to be transferred to Philadelphia, where there is much to be done at the present moment."

This suggestion effectually awoke Brand from his day-dream.

"Philadelphia!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said the other, speaking very slowly, as if anxious that every word should have weight. "My visit, short as it was, enabled me to see how well one might employ one's whole lifetime there—with such results as would astonish our good friends at head-quarters, I am sure of that. True, the parting from one's country might be a little painful at first; but that is not the greatest of the sacrifices that one should be prepared to submit to. However," he added, rather more lightly, "this is still to be decided on; meanwhile I hope, and I am sure you hope too, Mr. Brand, that I shall be able to satisfy the Council that the English section does not draw back when called on for its services."

"No doubt—no doubt," Brand said; but the pointed way in which his companion had spoken did not escape him, and promised to afford him still further food for reflection.

But if this was a threat, he would show no fear.

"Molyneux wishes to get back North as soon as possible," he said, in a matter-of-fact way, just as if talking of commonplace affairs the whole time. "I suppose his initiation could take place to-morrow night?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Lind, following his visitor to the door. "And you must certainly allow me to thank you once more, my dear Mr. Brand, for your service in securing to us such an ally. I should like to have talked with you about your experiences in the North; but you agree with me that the suggestion I have made demands your serious consideration first—is it not so?"

Brand nodded

"I will let you know to-morrow," said he. "Good-morning!"

"Good-morning!" said Mr. Lind, pleasantly; and then the door was shut.

He was attended down-stairs by the stout old German, who, on reaching the front-door, drew forth a letter from his pocket and handed it to him with much pretence of mystery. He was thinking of other things, to tell the truth; and as he walked along he regarded the outside of the envelope with but little curiosity. It was addressed, "*All' Egregio Sigmore, Il Signor G. Brand.*"

"No doubt a begging letter from some Leicester Square fellow," he thought,

Presently, however, he opened the letter, and read the following message, which was also in Italian:

"The beautiful caged little bird sighs and weeps, because she thinks she is forgotten. A word of remembrance would be kind, if her friend is discreet and secret. Above all, no open strife. This from one who departs. Farewell!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A FRIEND'S ADVICE.

THIS must be said for George Brand, that while he was hard and unsympathetic in the presence of those whom he disliked or distrusted, in the society of those whom he did like and did trust he was docile and acquiescent as a child, easily led and easily persuaded. When he went from Lind's chamber, which had been to him full of an atmosphere of impatience and antagonism, to Lord Evelyn's study, and found his friend sitting reading there, his whole attitude changed; and his first duty was to utter a series of remonstrances about the thousand pounds.

"You can't afford it, Evelyn. Why didn't you come to me? I would have given it to you a dozen times over rather than you should have paid it."

"No doubt you would," said the pale lad. "That is why I did not come to you."

"I wish you could get it back."

"I would not take it back. It is little enough I can do; why not let me give such help as I can? If only those girls would begin to marry off, I might do more. But there is such a band of them that men are afraid to come near them."

"I think it would be a pity to spoil the group," said Brand. "The country should subscribe to keep them as they are—the perfect picture of an English family. However, to return: you must promise me not to commit any of these extravagances again. If any appeal is made to you, come to me."

But here a thought seemed to strike him;

"Ah," he said, "I have something to tell you. Lind is trying to get me to enter the same grade of officership with himself. And do you know what the first qualification is?—that you give up every penny you possess in the world."

"Well?"

"Well!"

The two friends stared at each other—the one calmly inquisitive, the other astounded.

"I thought you would have burst out laughing!" Brand exclaimed.

"Why?" said the other. "You have already done more for them—for us—than that: why should you not do all in your power? Why should you not do all that you can, and while you can? Look!"

They were standing at the window. On the other side of the street far below them were some funeral carriages; at this precise moment the coffin was being carried across the pavement.

"That is the end of it. I say, why shouldn't you do all that you can, and while you can?"

"Do you want reasons? Well, one has occurred to me since I came into this room. A minute ago I said to you that you must not repeat that extravagance; and I said if you were appealed to again you could come to me. But what if I had already surrendered every penny in the world? I wish to retain in my own hands at least the power to help my friends."

"That is only another form of selfishness," said Lord Evelyn, laughing. "I fear you are as yet of weak faith, Brand."

He turned from the light, and went and sunk into the shadow of a great arm-chair.

"Now I know what you are going to do, Evelyn," said his friend. "You are going to talk me out of my common-sense; and I will not have it. I want to show you why it is impossible I should agree to this demand."

"If you feel it to be impossible, it is impossible."

"My dear fellow, is it reasonable?"

"I dislike things that are reasonable."

"There is but one way of getting at you. Have you thought of Natalie?"

"Ah!" said the other, quickly raising himself into an expectant attitude.

"You will listen now, I suppose, to reason, to common-sense. Do you think it likely that, with the possibility of her becoming my wife, I am going to throw away this certainty and leave her to all chances of the world? Lind says that the Society amply provides for its officers. Very well; that is quite probable. I tell him that I am not afraid for myself; if I had to think of myself alone, there is no saying what I might not do, even if I were to laugh at myself for doing it. But how about Natalie? Lind might die. I might be sent away to the ends of the earth. Do you think I am going to leave her at the mercy of a lot of people whom she never saw?"

Lord Evelyn was silent.

"Besides, there is more than that," his friend continued, warmly. "You may call it selfishness, if you like, but if you love a woman and she gives her life into your hands—well, she has the first claim on you. I will put it to you: do you think I am going to sell the Beeches—when—when she might live there?"

Lord Evelyn did not answer.

"Of course I am willing to subscribe largely," his friend continued; "and Natalie herself would say yes to that. But I am not ambitious. I don't want to enter that grade. I don't want to sit in Lind's chair when he gets elected to the Council, as has been suggested to me. I am not qualified for it; I don't care about it; I can best do my own work in my own way."

At last Lord Evelyn spoke; but it was in a meditative fashion, and not very much to the point. He lay back in his easy-chair, his hands clasped behind his head, and talked; and his talk was not at all about the selling of Hill Beeches in Buckinghamshire, but of much more abstract matters. He spoke of the divine wrath of the reformer—what a curious thing it was, that fiery impatience with what was wrong in the world; how it cropped up here and there from time to time; and how one abuse after another had been burnt up by it and swept away forever. Give the man possessed of this holy rage all the beauty and wealth and ease in the world, and he is not satisfied; there is something within him that vibrates to the call of humanity without; others can pass by what does not affect themselves with a laugh or a shrug of indifference; he only must stay and labor till the wrong thing is put right.

And how often had he been jeered at by the vulgar of his time ; how Common-Sense had pointed the finger of scorn at him ; how Respectability had called him crazed ! John Brown at Harper's Ferry is only a ridiculous old fool ; his effort is absurd ; even gentlemen in the North feel an "intellectual satisfaction" that he is hanged, because of his "preposterous miscalculation of possibilities." Yes, no doubt ; you hang him, and there is an end ; but "his soul goes marching on," and the slaves are freed ! You want to abolish the Corn-laws ?—all good society shrieks at you at first : you are a Radical, a regicide, a Judas Iscariot ; but in time the nation listens, and the poor have cheap bread. "Mazzini is mad !" the world cries : "why this useless bloodshed ? It is only political murder." Mazzini is mad, no doubt ; but in time the beautiful dream of Italy—of "Italia, the world's wonder, the world's care"—comes true. And what matter to the reformer, the agitator, the dreamer, though you stone him to death, or throw him to the lions, or clap him into a nineteenth-century prison and shut his mouth that way ? He has handed on the sacred fire. Others will bear the torch ; and he who is unencumbered will outstrip his fellows. The wrong must be put right.

And so forth, and so forth. Brand sat and listened, recognizing here and there a proud, pathetic phrase of Natalie's, and knowing well whence the inspiration came ; and as he listened he almost felt as though that beautiful old place in Buckinghamshire was slipping through his fingers. The sacrifice seemed to be becoming less and less of a sacrifice ; it took more and more the form of a duty ; would Natalie's eyes smile approval ?

Brand jumped up, and took a rapid turn or two up and down the room.

"I won't listen to you, Evelyn. You don't know anything about money-matters. You care for nothing but ideas. Now, I come of a commercial stock, and I want to know what guarantee I have that this money, if I were to give it up, would be properly applied. Lind's assurances are all very well—"

"Oh yes, of course ; you have got back to Lind," said Lord Evelyn, waking up from his reveries. Do you know, my dear fellow, that your distrust of Lind is rapidly developing into a sharp and profound hatred ?"

"I take men as I find them. Perhaps you can explain to me how Lind should care so little for the future of his daughter as to propose—with the possibility of our marrying—that she should be left penniless ?"

"I can explain it to myself, but not to you; you are too thorough an Englishman."

"Are you a foreigner?"

"I try to understand those who are not English. Now, an Englishman's theory is that he himself, and his wife and children—his domestic circle, in fact—are the centre of creation; and that the fate of empires, as he finds that going one way or the other in the telegrams of the morning paper, is a very small matter compared with the necessity of Tom's going to Eton, or Dick's marrying and settling down as the bailiff of the Worcestershire farm. That is all very well; but other people may be of a different habit of mind. Lind's heart and soul are in his present work; he would sacrifice himself, his daughter, you, or anybody else to it, and consider himself amply justified. He does not care about money, or horses, or the luxury of a big establishment; I suppose he has had to live on simple fare many a time, whether he liked it or not, and can put up with whatever happens. If you imagine that you may be cheated by a portion of your money—supposing you were to adopt his proposal—going into his pocket as commission, you do him a wrong."

"No, I don't think that," Brand said, rather unwillingly. "I don't take him to be a common and vulgar swindler. And I can very well believe that he does not care very much for money or luxury or that kind of thing, so far as he himself is concerned. Still, you would think that the ordinary instinct of a father would prevent his doing an injury to the future of his daughter—"

"Would he consider it an injury. Would she?"

"Well, Brand said, "she is very enthusiastic, and noble, and generous, and does not know what dependence or poverty means. But he is a man of the world, and you would think he would look after his own kith and kin."

"Yes, that is a wholesome conservative English sentiment, but it does not rule the actions of everybody."

"But common sense—"

"Oh, bother common sense! Common-sense is only a grocer that hasn't got an idea beyond ham-and-eggs."

"Well, if I am only a grocer," Brand said, quite submissively, "don't you think the grocer, if he were asked to pay off the National Debt, ought to say, 'Gentlemen, that is a praiseworthy object; but in the meantime wouldn't it be advisable for me to make sure that my wife mayn't have to go on the parish?'"

Thereafter there was silence for a time, and when Brand next spoke it was in a certain, precise, hard fashion, as if he wished to make his meaning very clear.

"Suppose, Evelyn," he said, "I were to tell you what has occurred to me as the probable explanation of Lind's indifference about the future of his daughter, would you be surprised?"

"I expect it will be wrong, for you cannot do justice to that man; but I should like to hear it."

"I must tell you he wrote me a letter, a shilly-shallying sort of letter, filled with arguments to prove that a marriage between Natalie and myself would not be expedient, and all the rest of it: not absolutely refusing his consent, you understand, but postponing the matter, and hoping that on further reflection, et cætera, et cætera. Well, do you know what my conclusion is?—that he is definitely resolved I shall not marry his daughter; and that he is playing with me, humbugging me with the possibility of marrying her, until he induces me to hand him over my fortune for the use of the Society. Stare away as you like; that is what I believe to be true."

He rose and walked to the window, and looked out.

Well, Evelyn, whatever happens, I have to thank you for many things. It has been all like my boyhood come back again, but much more wonderful and beautiful. If I have to go to America, I shall take with me at least the memory of one night at Covent Garden. She was there—and Madame Potecki—and old Calabressa. It was *Fidelio* they were playing. She gave me some forget-me-nots."

"What do you mean by going to America?" Lord Evelyn said.

Brand remained at the window for a minute or two, silent, and then he returned to his chair.

"You will say I am unjust again. But unless I am incapable of understanding English—such English as he speaks—this is his ultimatum: that unless I give my property, every cent of it, over to the Society, I am to go to America. It is a distinct and positive threat."

"How can you say so!" the other remonstrated. "He has just been to America himself, without any compulsion whatever."

"He has been to America for a certain number of weeks. I am to go for life—and, as he imagines, alone."

His face had been growing darker and darker, the brows lowering ominously over the eyes.

"Now, Brand," his friend said, "you are letting your dis-

trust of this man Lind become a madness. What if he were to say to-morrow that you might marry Natalie the day after?"

The other looked up almost bewildered.

"I would say he was serving some purpose of his own. But he will not say that. He means to keep his daughter to himself, and he means to have my money."

"Why, you admitted, a minute ago, that even you could not suspect him of that!"

"Not for himself—no. Probably he does not care for money. But he cares for ambition—for power; and there is a vacancy in the Council. Don't you see? This would be a tremendous large sum in the eyes of a lot of foreigners: they would be grateful, would they not? And Natalie once transferred to Italy, I could console myself with the honor and dignity of Lind's chair in Lisle Street. Don't you perceive?"

"I perceive this—that you misjudge Lind altogether. I am sure of it. I have seen it from the beginning—from the moment you set your foot in his house. And you tried to blind yourself to the fact because of Natalie. Now that you imagine that he means to take Natalie from you, all your pent-up antagonism breaks loose. Meanwhile, what does Natalie herself say?"

"What does she say?" he repeated, mechanically. He also was lying back in his chair, his eyes gazing aimlessly at the window. But whenever anyone spoke of Natalie, or whenever he himself had to speak of her, a quite new expression came into his face; the brows lifted, the eyes were gentle. "What does she say? Why, nothing. Lind requested me neither to see her nor write to her; and I thought that reasonable until I should have heard what he had to say to me. There is a message I got half an hour ago—not from her."

He handed to Lord Evelyn the anonymous scroll that he had received from the old German.

"Poor old Calabressa!" he said. "Those Italians are always very fond of little mysteries. But how he must have loved that woman?"

"Natalie's mother?"

"Yes," said the other, absently. "I wonder he has never gone to see his sweetheart of former years."

"What do you mean?"

Brand started. It was not necessary that Lord Evelyn should in the mean time be intrusted with that secret.

"He told me that when he saw Natalie it was to him like a vision from the dead ; she was so like her mother. But I must be off, Evelyn ; I have to meet Molyneux at two. So that is your advice," he said, as he went to the door—"that I should comply with Lind's demand ; or—to put it another way—succumb to his threat ?"

"It is not my advice at all—quite the contrary. I say, if you have any doubt or distrust—if you cannot make the sacrifice without perfect faith and satisfaction to yourself—do not think of it."

"And go to America ?"

"I cannot believe that any such compulsory alternative exists. But about Natalie, surely you will send her a message ; Lind cannot object to that ?"

"I will send her no message ; I will go to her," the other said, firmly. "I believe Lind wishes me not to see her. Within the duties demanded of me by the Society, his wishes are to me commands ; elsewhere and otherwise neither his wishes nor his commands do I value more than a lucifer-match. Is that plain enough, Evelyn ?"

And so he went away, forgetting all the sage counsel Calabressa had given him ; thinking rather of the kindly, thoughtful, mysterious little message the old man had left behind him, and of the beautiful caged bird that sighed and wept because she thought she was forgotten. She should not think that long !

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PROMISE.

THIS was a dark time indeed for Natalie Lind—left entirely by herself, ignorant of what was happening around her, and haunted by vague alarms. But the girl was too proud to show to any one how much she suffered. On the contrary, she reasoned and remonstrated with herself ; and forced herself to assume an attitude of something more than resignation, of resolution. If it was necessary that her father should be obeyed, that her lover should maintain this cruel silence, even that he and she should have the wide Atlantic separate them forever, she would not repine. It was not for her who had so often appealed to others to shrink from sacrifice herself. And if this strange new hope that had filled her heart for a time had be finally abandoned, what

of that? What mattered a single life? She had the larger hope; there was another and greater future for her to think about; and she could cherish the thought that she at least had done nothing to imperil or diminish the work to which so many of her friends had given their lives.

But silence is hard to bear. Ever since the scene with her father, a certain undeclared estrangement had prevailed between these two; and no reference whatsoever had been made to George Brand. Her lover had sent her no message—no word of encouragement, of assurance, or sympathy. Even Calabressa had gone. There remained to her only the portrait that Calabressa had given her; and in the solitude of her own room many a time she sat and gazed at the beautiful face with some dim, wondering belief that she was looking at her other self, and that she could read in the features some portion of her own experiences, her own joys and sorrows. For surely those soft, dark, liquid eyes must have loved and been beloved? And had they too filled with gladness when a certain step had been heard coming near? and they looked up with trust and pride and tenderness, and filled with tears again in absence, when only the memory of loving words remained? She recalled many a time what Calabressa had said to her—"My child, may Heaven keep you as true and brave as your mother was, and send you more happiness." Her mother, then, had not been happy? But she was brave, Calabressa had said: when she loved a man, would she not show herself worthy of her love?

This was all very well; but in spite of her reasoning and her forced courage, and her self-possession in the presence of others, Natalie had got into the habit of crying in the quietude of her own room, to the great distress of the little Anneli, who had surprised her once or twice. And the rosy-cheeked German maid guessed pretty accurately what had happened; and wondered very much at the conduct of English lovers, who allowed their sweethearts to pine and fret in solitude without sending them letters or coming to see them. But on this particular afternoon Anneli opened the door, in answer to a summons, and found outside a club-commissionaire whom she had seen once or twice before; and when he gave her a letter, addressed in a handwriting which she recognized, and ask for an answer, she was as much agitated as if it had come from her own sweetheart in Gorlitz. She snatched it from the man, as if she feared he would take it back. She flew with it up-stairs, breathless. She forgot to knock at the door.

"Oh, Fraulein, it is a letter!" said she, in great excitement, "and there is to be an answer—"

Then she hesitated. But the good-sense of the child told her she ought to go.

"I will wait outside, Fraulein. Will you ring when you have written the answer?"

When Natalie opened the letter she was outwardly quite calm—a little pale, perhaps; but as she read it her heart beat fast. And it was her heart that instantly dictated the answer to this brief and simple appeal:

"MY NATALIE,—It is your father's wish that I should not see you. Is it your wish also? There is something I would like to say to you."

It was her heart that answered. She rose directly. She never thought twice, or even once, about any wish, or menace, or possible consequence. She went straight to her desk, and with a shaking hand wrote these lines:

"MY OWN,—Come to me now, at any time—when you please. Am I not yours? NATALIE."

Despite herself, she had to pause, to steady her hand—and because her heart was beating so fast that she felt choked—before she could properly address the envelope. Then she carried the letter to Anneli, who she knew was waiting outside. That done, she shut herself in again, to give herself time to think, though in truth she could scarcely think at all. For all sorts of emotions were struggling for the mastery of her—joy and a proud resolve distinctly predominant. It was done, and she would abide by it. She was not given to fear.

But she tried hard to think. At last her lover was coming to her; he would ask her what she was prepared to do: what would she answer?

Then, again, the joy of the thought that she was about to see him drove every other consideration out of her mind. How soon might he be here? Hurriedly she went to a jar of flowers on the table, chose some scarlet geraniums, and turned to a mirror. Her haste did not avail much, for her fingers were still trembling; but that was the color he had said, on one occasion, suited her best. She had not been wearing flowers in her hair of late.

From time to time, for a second or so, some thought of her father intervened. But then her father had only enjoined her to dismiss forever the hope of her marrying the man to

whom she had given her heart and her life: that could not prevent her loving him, and seeing him, and telling him that her love was his. She wished the geraniums were less rose-red and more scarlet in hue. It was the scarlet he had approved of—that evening that he and she the little Polish lady had dined together.

She had not long to wait. With a quick, intense consciousness she heard the hansom drive up, and the rapid knock that followed; her heart throbbed through the seconds of silence; then she knew that he was ascending the stair; then it seemed to her as if the life would go out of her altogether. But when he flung the door open and came toward her; when he caught her two hands in his—one hand in each hand—and held them tight; when, in a silence that neither cared to break, he gazed into her rapidly moistening eyes—then the full tide of joy and courage returned to her heart, and she was proud that she had sent him that answer. For some seconds—to be remembered during a life time—they regarded each other in silence; then he released her hands, and began to put back the hair from her forehead as if he would see more clearly into the troubled deeps of her eyes; and then, somehow—perhaps to hide her crying—she buried her face in his breast, and his arms were around her, and she was sobbing out all the story of her waiting and her despair.

“What!” said he, cheerfully, to calm and reassure her, “the brave Natalie to be frightened like that!”

“I was alone,” she murmured. “I had no one to speak to; and I could not understand. Oh, my love, my love, you do not know what you are to me!”

He kissed her; her cheeks were wet.

“Natalie,” said he in a low voice, “don’t forget this: we may be separated—that is possible—I don’t know; but if we live fifty years apart from each other—if you never hear one word more from me or of me—be sure of this, that I am thinking of you always, and loving you, as I do at this moment when my arms are around you. Will you remember that? Will you believe that—always?”

“I could not think otherwise,” she answered. “But now that you are with me—that I can hear you speak to me—” And at this point her voice failed her altogether; and he could only draw her closer to him, and soothe and caress her, and stroke the raven-black hair that had never before thrilled his fingers with its soft, strange touch.

“Perhaps,” she said at last, in a broken and hesitating voice, “you will blame me for having said what I have said.

I have had no girl-companions; scarcely any woman to tell me what I should do and say. But—but I thought you were going to America—I thought I should never see you again—I was lonely and miserable; and when I saw you again, how could I help saying I was glad? How could I help saying that, and more?—for I never knew it till now. Oh, my love, do you know that you have become the whole world to me? When you are away from me, I would rather die than live!”

“Natalie—my life!”

“I must say that to you—once—that you may understand—if we should never see each other again. And now—”

She gently released herself from his embrace, and went and sat down by the table. He took a chair near her and held her hand. She would not look up, for her eyes were still wet with tears.

“And now,” she said, making a great effort to regain her self-control, “you must tell me about yourself. A woman may have her feelings and fancies, and cry over them when she is afraid or alone; that is nothing; it is the way of the world. It is a man’s fate that is of importance.”

“You must not talk like that, Natalie,” said he gravely. “Our fate is one. Without you, I don’t value my life more than this bit of geranium-leaf; with you, life would be worth having.”

“And you must not talk like that either,” she said. “Your life is valuable to others. Ah, my dear friend, that is what I have been trying to console myself with of late. I said, ‘Well, if he goes away and does not see me again, will he not be freer? He has a great work to do; he may have to go away from England for many years; why should he be encumbered with a wife?’”

“It was your father, I presume, who made those suggestions to you?” said Brand, regarding her.

“Yes; papa said something like that,” she answered, quite innocently. “That is what would naturally occur to him; his work has always the first place in his thoughts. And with you, too; is it not so?”

“No.”

She looked up quickly.

“I will be quite frank with you, Natalie. You have the first place in my thoughts; I hope you ever will have, while I am a living man. But cannot I give the Society all the work that is in me equally well, whether I love you or whether I don’t, whether you become my wife or whether you do not?

I have no doubt your father has been talking to you as he has been talking to me."

She placed her disengaged hand on the top of his, and said, gently,

"My father perhaps does not quite understand you; perhaps he is too anxious. I, for one, am not anxious—about *that*. Do you know how I trust you, my dearest of friends? Sometimes I have said to myself, 'I will ask him for a pledge. I will say to him that he must promise, that he must swear to me, that whatever happens as between him and me, nothing, nothing, nothing in all the world will induce him to give up what he has undertaken;' but then again I have said to myself, 'No, I can trust him for that.'"

"I think you may, Natalie," said he, rather absently. "And yet what could have led me to join such a movement but your own noble spirit—the glamour of your voice—the thanks of your eyes? You put madness into my blood with your singing."

"Do you call it madness?" she said, with a faint flush in the pale olive face. "Is it not rather kindness—is it not justice to others—the desire to help—something that the angels in heaven must feel when they look down and see what a great misery there is in the world?"

"I think you are an angel yourself, Natalie," said he, quite simply, "and that you have come down and got among a lot of people who don't treat you too well. However, we must come to the present moment. You spoke of America; now what do you know about that?"

The abrupt question startled her. She had been so overjoyed to see him—her whole soul was so bouyant and radiant with happiness—that she had quite forgotten or dismissed the vague fears that had been of late besetting her. But she proceeded to tell him, with a little hesitation here and there, and with a considerable smoothing down of phrases, what her father had said to her. She tried to make it appear quite reasonable. And all she prayed for was that, if he were sent to America, if they had to part for many years, or forever, she should be permitted to say good-bye to him.

"We are not parted yet," said Brand, briefly.

The fact was, he had just got a new key to the situation. So that threat about America could serve a double purpose? He was now more than ever convinced that Ferdinand Lind was merely playing off and on with him until this money question should be settled; and that he had been resolved

all the time that his daughter should not marry. He was beginning to understand.

"Natalie," said he, slowly, "I told you I had something to say to you. You know your father wrote to me in the North, asking me neither to see you nor write to you until some matter between him and me was settled. Well, I respected his wish until I should know what the thing was. Now that I do know, it seems to me that you are as much concerned as any one; and that it is not reasonable, it is not possible, I should refrain from seeing you and consulting you."

"No one shall prevent your seeing me, when it is your wish," said the girl, in a low voice.

"This, then, is the point: you know enough about the Society to understand, and there is no particular secret. Your father wishes me to enter the higher grade of officers, under the Council; and the first condition is that one surrenders up every farthing of one's property."

"Yes?"

He stared at her. Her "Yes?"—with its affectionate interest and its absolute absence of surprise—was almost the exact equivalent of Lord Evelyn's "Well?"

"Perhaps you would advise me to consent?" he said, almost in the way of a challenge.

"Ah, no," she said, with a smile. "It is not for me to advise on such things. What you decide for yourself, that will be right."

"But you don't understand, my darling. Supposing I were ambitious of getting higher office, which I am not; supposing I were myself willing to sell my property to swell the funds of the Society—and I don't think I should be willing in any case—do you think I would part with what ought to belong to my wife—to you, Natalie? Do you think I would have you marry a beggar—one dependent on the indulgence of people unknown to him?"

And now there was a look of real alarm on the girl's face.

"Ah!" she said, quickly. "Is not that what my father feared? You are thinking of me when you should think of others. Already I—I—interfere with your duty; I tempt you—"

"My darling, be calm, be reasonable. There is no duty in the matter; your father acknowledges that himself. It is a proposal I am free to accept or reject, as I please; and now I promise you that, as you won't give me any advice, I shall decide without thinking of you at all. Will that satisfy you?"

She remained silent for a second or two, and then she said thoughtfully,

"Perhaps you could decide just as if there were no possibility of my ever being your wife?"

"To please you, I will assume that too."

Then she said, after a bit,

"One word more, dearest; you must grant me this—that I may always be able to think of it when I am alone and far from you, and be able to reassure myself: it is the promise I thought I could do so well without. Now you will give it me?"

"What promise?"

"That whatever happens to you or to me, whatever my father demands of me, and wherever you may have to go, you will never withdraw from what you have undertaken."

He met the earnest, pleading look of those beautiful eyes without flinching. His heart was light enough, so far as such a promise was concerned. Heavier oaths than that lay on him.

"That is simple enough, Natalie," said he. "I promise you distinctly that nothing shall cause me to swerve from my allegiance to the Society; I will give absolute and implicit obedience, and the best of such work as I can do. But they must not ask me to forget my Natalie."

She rose, still holding his hand, and stood by him, so that he could not quite see her face. Then she said, in a very low voice indeed,

"Dearest, may I give you a ring?—you do not wear one at all—"

"But surely, Natalie, it is for me to choose a ring for you?"

"Ah, it is not that I mean," she said, quickly, and with her face flushing. "It is a ring that will remind you of the promise you have given me to-day—when we may not be able to see each other."

CHAPTER XXVII.

KIRSKI.

To this pale student from the Reading-room of the British Museum, as he stands on a bridge crossing one of the smaller canals, surely the scene around him must seem one fitted to gladden the heart; for it is Venice at mid-day, in glowing

sunlight : the warm cream-white fronts of the marble palaces and casemented houses, the tall campanili with their golden tips, the vast and glittering domes of the churches, all rising fair and dream-like into the intense dark-blue of a cloudless sky. How the hot sunlight brings out all the beautiful color of the place—the richly laden fruit-stalls in the Riva dei Schiavoni ; the russet and saffron sails of the vessels ; the canal-boats coming in to the steps with huge open tuns of purple wine to be ladled out with copper buckets ; and then all around the shining, twinkling plain of the green-hued sea, catching here and there a reflection from the softly red walls of San Giorgio and the steel-gray gleaming domes of Santa Maria della Salute.

Then the passers-by : these are not like the dusky ghosts that wander through the pale-blue mists of Bloomsbury. Here comes a buxom water-carrier, in her orange petticoat and sage-green shawl, who has the two copper cans at the end of the long piece of wood poised on her shoulders, pretty nearly filled to the brim. Then a couple of the gayer gondoliers in white and blue, with fancy waist-belts, and rings in their ears. A procession of black-garbed monks wends slowly along ; they have come from the silence of the Armenian convent over there at the horizon. Some wandering minstrels shoot their gondola into the mouth of the canal, and strike up a gay waltz, while they watch the shaded balconies above. Here is a Lascar ashore from the big steamer that is to start for Alexandria on the morrow. A company of soldiers, with blue coats, canvas trousers, and white gaiters, half march and half trot along to the quick, crackling music of the buglers. A swarthy-visaged maiden, with the calm brow of a Madonna, appears in the twilight of a balcony, with a packet of maize in her hand, and in a minute or two she is surrounded with a cloud of pigeons. Then this beggar—a child of eight or ten—red-haired and blue-eyed : surely she has stepped out of one of Titian's pictures ? She whines and whimpers her prayers to him ; but there is something in her look that he has seen elsewhere. It belongs to another century.

From these reveries Mr. Gathorne Edwards was aroused by some one tapping him on the shoulder. It was Calabressa.

“ My dear Monsieur Edouarts,” said he, in a low voice—for the red-haired little beggar was still standing there expectant —“ he has gone over to the shipping-place. We must follow later on. Meanwhile, regard this letter that has just been forwarded to me. Ah, you English do not forget your promises ! ”

Edwards threw a piece of money to the child, who passed on. Then he took the letter and read it. It was in French.

"DEAR CALABRESSA,—I want you to tell me what you have done with Yakov Kirski. They seem unwilling to say here, and I do not choose to inquire further. But I undertook to look after him, and I understood he was getting on very well, and now you have carried him off. I hope it is with no intention of allowing him to go back to Russia, where he will simply make an attempt at murder, and fall into the hands of the police. Do not let the poor devil go and make a fool of himself. If you want money to send him back to England, show this letter, or forward it to Messrs. ———, who will give you what you want.

"Your friend,

GEORGE BRAND.

"P.S.—I have seen your beautiful caged little bird. I can say no more at present, but that she shall not suffer through any neglect of mine."

"What is that about the caged bird?" said Edwards.

"Ah, the caged bird?" said Calabressa. "The caged bird?—do you see, that is a metaphor. It is nothing; one makes one's little joke. But I was saying, my dear friend, that you English do not promise, and then forget. No; he says, 'I will befriend this poor devil of a Kirski;' and here he comes inquiring after him. Now I must answer the letter; you will accompany me, Monsieur Edouarts? Ten minutes in my little room, and it is done."

So the two walked away together. This Edwards who now accompanied Calabressa was a man of about thirty, who looked younger; tall, fair, with a slight stoop, a large forehead, and blue eyes that stared near-sightedly through spectacles. The ordinary expression of his face was grave even to melancholy, but his occasional smile was humorous, and when he laughed the laugh was soft and light like that of a child. His knowledge of modern languages was considered to be almost unrivalled, though he had travelled but little.

When, in this little room, Calabressa had at length finished his letter and dusted it over with sand, he was not at all loath to show it to this master of modern speech. Calabressa was proud of his French; and if he would himself have acknowledged that it was perhaps here and there of doubtful idiom and of phonetic spelling, would he not have claimed for it that it was fluent, incisive, and ornate?

"My valued friend, it is not permitted me to answer your

questions in precise terms ; but he to whom you have had the goodness to extend your bountiful protection is now safe, and under my own care. No ; he goes not back to Russia. His thoughts are different ; his madness travels in other directions ; it is no longer revenge, it is adoration and gratitude that his heart holds. And you, can you not guess who has worked the miracle ? Think of this : you have a poor wretch who is distracted by injuries and suffering ; he goes away alone into Europe ; he is buffeted about with the winds of hunger and thirst and cold ; he cannot speak ; he is like a dog—a wild beast that people drive away from their door. And all at once some one addresses him in gentle tones : it is the voice of an angel to him ! You plough and harrow the poor wretch's heart with suffering and contempt and hopelessness, until it is a desert, a wilderness ; but some one, by accident, one day drops a seed of kindness into it, and behold ! the beautiful flower of love springing up, and all the man's life going into it ! Can you understand—you who ought to understand ? Were you not present when the bewildered, starved, hunted creature heard that gentle voice of pity, like an angel speaking from heaven ? And if the beautiful girl, who will be the idol of my thoughts through my remaining years, if she does not know that she has rescued a human soul from despair, you will tell her—tell her from me, from Calabressa. What would not Kirski do for her ? you might well ask. The patient regards the physician who has cured him with gratitude : this is more than gratitude, it is worship. What she has preserved she owns ; he would give his life to her, to you, to any one whom she regards with affection. For myself, I do not say such things ; but she may count on me also, while one has yet life.

“I am yours, and hers, CALABRESSA.”

The letter was handed to Gathorne Edwards with a proud air ; and he read it, and handed it back.

“This man Kirski is not so much of a savage as you imagine,” he said. “He learns quickly, and forgets nothing. He can repeat all the articles of membership ; but it is No. 5 that he is particularly fond of. You have not heard him go over it, Calabressa ?”

“I ? No. He does not waste my time that way.”

“His pronunciation,” continued the younger man, with a smile, “is rather like the cracking of dry twigs. ‘Article 5. Whatever punishment may be decreed against any Officer, Companion, or Friend of the Society may be vicariously

borne by any other Officer, Companion, or Friend who of his own full and free consent acts as substitute; the original offender becoming thereby redeemed, acquitted, and released.' And then he invariably adds: "Why not make me of some use? To myself my life is nothing.'"

At this moment there was a tapping at the door.

"It is himself," said Edwards.

"Enter!" Calabressa called out.

The man who now came into the room was a very different looking person from the wild, unkempt creature who had confronted Natalie Lind in Curzon Street. The voluminous red beard and mustache had been cropped; he wore the clothes of a decent workman, with a foreign touch here and there; he was submissive and docile in look.

"Well, where have you been, my friend?" Calabressa said to him in Italian.

Kirski glanced at Gathorne Edwards, and began to speak to him in Russian.

"Will you explain for me, little father? I have been to many churches."

"The police will not suspect him if he goes there," said Calabressa, laughing.

"And to the shops in the Piazza San Marco, where the pictures are of the saints."

"Well?"

"Little father, I can find no one of the saints so beautiful as that one in England that the Master Calabressa knows."

Calabressa laughed again.

"Allons, mon grand enfant! Tell him that if it is only a likeness he is hunting for, I can show him one."

With that he took out from his breast-pocket a small pocket book, opened it, found a certain photograph, and put it on the table, shoving it over toward Kirski. The dim-eyed Russian did not dare to touch it; but he stooped over it, and he put one trembling hand on each side of it, as if he would concentrate the light, and gazed at this portrait of Natalie Lind until he could see nothing at all for the tears that came into his eyes. Then he rose abruptly, and said something rapidly to Edwards.

"He says, 'Take it away, or you will make me a thief. It is worth more than all the diamonds in the world.'"

Calabressa did not laugh this time. He regarded the man with a look in which there was as much pity as curiosity.

"The poor devil!" he said. "Tell him I will ask the beautiful saint whom he worships so to send him a portrait

of herself with her own hands. I will. She will do as much as that for her friend Calabressa."

This had scarcely been translated to Kirski when, in his sudden gratitude, he caught Calabressa's hand and kissed it.

"Tell him, also," Calabressa said, good-naturedly, "that if he is hungry before dinner-time there is sausage and bread and beer in the cupboard. But he must not stir out till we come back. Allons, mon bon camarade!"

Calabressa lit another cigarette, and the two companions sallied forth. They stepped into a gondola, and presently they were being borne swiftly over the plain of light-green water. By-and-by they plunged into a varied and picturesque mass of shipping, and touched land again in front of a series of stores. The gondola was ordered to await their return.

Calabressa passed without question through the lower floor of this particular building, where the people were busy with barrels of flour, and led the way up-stairs until he stopped at a certain door. He knocked thrice and entered. There was a small, dark man seated at a table, apparently engaged with some bills of lading.

"You are punctual, Brother Calabressa."

"Your time is valuable, Brother Granaglia. Let me present to you my comrade Signor Edouarts, of whom I wrote to you."

The sallow-faced little man with the tired look bowed courteously, begged his guests to be seated, and pushed toward them a box of cigarettes.

"Now, my Calabressa," said he, "to the point. As you guess, I am pressed for time. Seven days hence will find me in Moscow."

"In Moscow!" exclaimed Calabressa. "You dare not!"

Granaglia waved his hand a couple of inches.

"Do not protest. It may be your turn to-morrow. And my good friend Calabressa would find Moscow just about as dangerous for him as for me."

"Monsieur le Secrétaire, I have no wish to try. But to the point, as you say. May one ask how it stands with Zaccatelli?"

Granaglia glanced at the Englishman.

"Of course he knows everything," Calabressa explained instantly. "How otherwise should I have brought him with me?"

"Well, Zaccatelli has received his warning."

"Who carried it?"

"I."

posite, indeed. I should like to get rid of a lot of old associations, and start in a new and wider field. With another life to lead, don't you want another sort of world to live it in?"

Lord Evelyn regarded him. No one had observed with a closer interest the gradual change that had come over this old friend of his. And he was proud of it, too; for had it not been partly of his doing?

"One does not breathe free air here," Brand continued, rather absently—as if his mental vision was fixed on the greater spaces beyond the seas. "With a new sort of life beginning, wouldn't it be better to start it under new conditions—feeling yourself unhampered—with nothing around to disturb even the foolishness of your dreams and hopes? Then you could work away at your best, leaving the result to time."

"I know perfectly what all that means," Lord Evelyn said. "You are anxious to get away from Lind. You believe in your work, but you don't like to be associated with him."

"Perhaps I know a little more than you, Evelyn," said Brand, gently, "of Lind's relation to the society. He does not represent it to me at all. He is only one of its servants, like ourselves. But don't let us talk about him."

"You *must* talk about him," Lord Evelyn said, as he pulled out his watch. "It is now seven. At eight you go to the initiation of Molyneux, and you have promised to give Lind his answer to-night. Well?"

Brand was playing idly with a pocket-pencil. After a minute or two, he said,

"I promised Natalie to consider this thing without any reference to her whatever—that I would decide just as if there was no possibility of her becoming my wife. I promised that; but it is hard to do, Evelyn. I have tried to imagine my never having seen her, and that I had been led into this affair solely through you. Then I do think that if you had come to me and said that my giving up every penny I possess would forward a good work—would do indirect benefit to a large number of people, and so forth—I do think I could have said, 'All right, Evelyn; take it.' I never cared much for money; I fancy I could get on pretty well on a sovereign a week. I say that if you had come to me with this request—"

"Precisely," Lord Evelyn said, quickly. "You would have said yes, if I had come to you. But because it is Lind, whom you distrust, you fall away from the height of self-sacrifice, and regard the proposal from the point of view of the Waldegrave Club. Mind you, I am not counselling you one way or the

other. I am only pointing out to you that it is your dislike of Lind that prevents your doing what you otherwise would have done."

"Very well," said the other, boldly. "Have I not reason to distrust him? How can I explain his conduct and his implied threats except on the supposition that he has been merely playing with me, as far as his daughter is concerned; and that as soon as I had handed over this property I should find it out? Oh, it is a very pretty scheme altogether! This heap of English money transferred to the treasury; Lind at length achieving his ambition of being put on the Council; Natalie carried off to Italy; and myself granted the honor of stepping into Lind's shoes in Lisle Street. On the other hand: 'Refuse, and we pack you off to America.' Now, you know, Evelyn, one does not like to be threatened into anything!"

"Then you have decided to say, No?"

He did not answer for a second or two; when he did, his manner was quite changed.

"I rather think I know what both you and Natalie would have me do, although you won't say so explicitly. And if you and she had come to me with this proposal, do you think there would have been any difficulty? I should have been satisfied if she had put her hand in mine, and said, 'Thank you.' Then I should have reminded her that she was sacrificing something too."

He relapsed into silence again; Lord Evelyn was vaguely conscious that the minutes were passing by, and that his friend seemed as far off as ever from any decision.

"You remember the old-fashioned rose-garden, Evelyn?"

"At the beeches? Yes."

"Don't you think Natalie would like the view from that side of the house? And if she chose that side, I was thinking of having a conservatory built all the length of the rooms, with steps opening out into the rose-garden. She could go out there for a stroll of a morning."

So these had been his dreams.

"If I go to America," he said presently, "I should expect you to look after the old place a little bit. You might take your sisters there occasionally, and turn them loose; it wants a woman's hand here and there. Mrs. Alleyne would put you all right; and of course I should send Waters down, and give up those rooms in Buckingham Street."

"But I cannot imagine your going to America, somehow,"

Lord Evelyn said. "Surely there is plenty for you to do here."

"I will say this of Lind, that he is not an idle talker. What he says he means. Besides, Molyneux can take up my work in the North; he is the very man."

Again silence. It was now half-past seven.

"I wish, though, it had been something more exciting," Brand said. "I should not have minded having a turn at the Syrian business; I am not much afraid of risking my neck. There is not much danger in Philadelphia."

"But look here, Brand," said Lord Evelyn, regarding him attentively. "You are speaking with great equanimity about your going to America; possibly you might like the change well enough; but do I understand you that you are prepared to go alone?"

Brand looked up; he understood what was meant.

"If I am ordered—yes."

He held out his right hand; on the third finger there was a massive gold ring—a plain hoop, without motto or design whatever.

"There," said he, "is the first ring I ever wore. It was given to me this afternoon, to remind me of a promise; and that promise is to me more binding than a hundred oaths."

He rose with a sigh.

"Ah, well, Evelyn, whatever happens we will not complain. There have been compensations."

"But you have not told me what answer you mean to give to Lind."

"Suppose I wait until I see him before deciding?"

"Then you will say, No. You have allowed your distrust of him to become a sort of mania, and the moment you see him the mere sight of him will drive you into antagonism."

"I tell you what I wish I could do, Evelyn," said the other, laughing: "I wish I could turn over everything I have got to you, and escape scot-free to America and start my own life free and unencumbered."

"And alone?"

His face grew grave again.

"There is nothing possible else!" said he.

It was nearly eight o'clock when he left. As he walked along Piccadilly, a clear and golden twilight was shining over the trees in the Green Park. All around him was the roar of the London streets; but it was not that that he heard. Was it not rather the sound of a soft, low voice, and the silvery

notes of the zither? His memory acted as a sea-shell, and brought him an echo from other days and other climes.

“Behold the beautiful night—the wind sleeps drowsily—the silent shores slumber in the dark:

“Sul placido elemento
Vien meco a navigar!

“The soft wind moves—as it stirs among the leaves—it moves and dies—among the murmur of the water:

“Lascia l'amico tetto,
Vien meco a navigar!

“Now on the spacious mantle—of the already darkening heavens—see, oh the shining wonder—how the white stars tremble:

“Sul l'onde addormentate
Vien meco a navigar!”

This was the voice that he heard amidst the roar of the London streets. Would he hear it far away on the wide Atlantic, with the shores of England hidden behind the mists of rain? To-night was to decide what the future of his life was to be.

If Natalie had appeared at this moment, and said to him, “Dearest, let it be as my father wishes;” or if Lord Evelyn had frankly declared to him that it was his duty to surrender his possessions to this Society to which he had devoted his life, there would have been not a moment’s hesitation. But now he was going to see a man whom he suspected and was inclined to hate, and his nature began to harden. It would be a question between one man of the world and another. Sentiment would be put aside. He would no longer be played with. A man should be master of his own affairs.

This was what he said to himself. But he had quite forgotten his determination to consider this matter as if no Natalie existed; and his resolve to exclude sentiment altogether did not interfere with the fact that always, if unconsciously, there remained in his mind a certain picture he had been dreaming a good deal about of late. It was a picture of an old-fashioned rose-garden in the light of an English summer morning, with a young wife walking there, herself taller and fairer than any flower. Would she sing, in her gladness, the songs of other lands, to charm the sweet English air? There was that one about *O dolce Napoli!—o suol beato!*—

When he got to Lisle Street, every one had arrived except Molyneux himself. Mr. Lind was gravely polite to him. Of

course no mention could then be made about private affairs ; the talk going on was all about the East, and how certain populations were faring.

Presently the pink-faced farmer-agitator was ushered in, looking a little bit alarmed. But this frightened look speedily disappeared, and gave place to one of mild astonishment, as he appeared to recognize the faces of one or two of those in the room. The business of the evening, so far as the brief formalities were concerned, was speedily got over, and five of the members of the small assembly immediately left.

"Now, Mr. Molyneux," said Ferdinand Lind, pleasantly, "Mr. Brand and I have some small private matters to talk over : will you excuse us if we leave you for a few minutes ? Here are some articles of our association which you may look over in the mean time. May I trouble you to follow me, Mr. Brand ?"

Brand followed him into an inner and smaller room, and sat down.

"You said you would have your mind made up to-day with regard to the proposal I put before you," Mr. Lind observed, with a matter-of-fact air, as he drew in his chair to the small table.

Brand simply nodded, and said "Yes." He was measuring his man. He thought his manner was a good deal too suave.

"But allow me to say, my dear Mr. Brand, that, as far I am concerned, there is no hurry. Have you given yourself time ? It is a matter of moment ; one should consider."

"I have considered."

His tone was firm : one would have thought he had never had any hesitation at all. But his decision had not been definitely arrived at until, some quarter of an hour before, he had met Ferdinand Lind face to face.

"I may say at once that I prefer to remain in my present grade."

He was watching Lind as he spoke. There was a slight, scarcely perceptible, movement of the eyebrows ; that was all. The quiet courtesy of his manner remained undisturbed.

"That is your decision, then ?" he said, just as if some trifling matter had been arranged.

"Perhaps I need not bother you with my reasons," Brand continued, speaking slowly and with precision, "but there are several."

"I have no doubt you have given the subject serious con-

sideration," said Mr. Lind, without expressing any further interest or curiosity.

Now this was not at all what George Brand wanted. He wanted to have his suspicions allayed or confirmed. He wanted to let this man know how he read the situation.

"One reason I may as well name to you, Mr. Lind," said he, being forced to speak more plainly. "If I were to marry, I should like to give my wife a proper home. I should not like her to marry a pauper—one dependent on the complaisance of other people. And really it has seemed to me strange that you, with your daughter's future, your daughter's interests to think of, should have made this proposal—"

Lind interrupted him with a slight deprecatory motion of the hand.

"Pardon me," said he. "Let us confine ourselves to business, if you please."

"I presume it is a man's business to provide for the future of his wife," said Brand, somewhat hotly, his pride beginning to kick against this patronizing graciousness of manner.

"I must beg of you, my dear sir," said Mr. Lind, with the same calm courtesy, "to keep private interests and projects entirely outside of this matter, which relates to the Society alone, and your duty, and the wishes of those with whom you are associated. You have decided?—very well. I am sorry; but you are within your right."

"How can you talk like that?" said Brand, bluntly. "Sorry that your daughter is not to marry a beggar?"

"I must decline to have Natalie introduced into this subject in any way whatever," said Mr. Lind.

"Let us drop the subject, then," said Brand, in a friendly way, for he was determined to have some further enlightenment. "Now about Natalie. May I ask you plainly if you have any objection to a marriage between her and myself?"

The answer was prompt and emphatic.

"I have every objection. I have said before that it would be inexpedient in many ways. It is not to be thought of."

Brand was not surprised by this refusal; he had expected it; he had put the question as a matter of form.

"Now one other question, Mr. Lind, and I shall be satisfied," said he, watching the face of the man opposite him with a keen scrutiny. "Was it ever your intention, at any time, to give your consent to our marriage, in any circumstances whatever?"

Ferdinand Lind was an admirable actor.

"Is it worth while discussing imaginary things—possibilities only?" he said, carelessly.

"Because, you see," continued Brand, who was not to be driven from his point, "any plain and ordinary person, looking from the outside at the whole affair, might imagine that you had been merely temporizing with me, neither giving nor refusing your consent, until I had handed over this money; and that, as you had never intended to let your daughter marry, that was the reason why you did not care whether I retained a penny of my own property or not."

Lind did not flinch for an instant; nor was there the slightest trace of surprise, or annoyance, or resentment in his look. He rose and pushed back his chair.

"Suppose we let outsiders think what they please, Mr. Brand," said he, with absolute composure. "We have more serious matters to attend to."

Brand rose also. He guessed what was coming, and he had nerved himself to face it. The whole course of this man's action was now as clear to him as noonday.

"I have been considering further the suggestion I mentioned to you the other day, that you should go over to some of the big American cities," said Mr. Lind, almost with an indifferent air as he turned over some papers. "We are strong there; you will find plenty of friends; but what is wanted is cohesion, arrangement, co-operation. Now you say yourself this Mr. Molyneux would be an admirable successor to you in the North?"

"None better," said Brand. This sentence of banishment had been foreseen; he knew how to encounter it when it came.

"I think, on the whole, it would be advisable then. When could you go?"

"I could start to-night," he said. But then, despite himself, a blush of embarrassment mounted to his forehead, and he added quickly, "No; not to-night. The day after to-morrow."

"There is no need for any such great hurry," said Mr. Lind, with his complaisant smile. "You will want much direction, many letters. Come, shall we join your friend in the other room?"

The two men, apparently on the best of terms, went back to Molyneux, and the talk became general. George Brand, as he sat there, kept his right hand shut tight, that so he could press the ring that Natalie had given him; and when he thought of America, it was almost with a sense of relief.

She would approve ; he would not betray his promise to her. But if only that one moment were over in which he should have to bid her farewell !

CHAPTER XXIX.

A GOOD-NIGHT MESSAGE.

BRAND had nerved himself for that interview ; he had determined to betray neither surprise nor concern ; he was prepared for the worst. When it was intimated to him that hence-forth his life was to be lived out beyond the seas, he had appeared to take it as a matter of course. Face to face with his enemy, he would utter no protest. Then, had he not solemnly promised to Natalie that nothing in the world should tempt him from his allegiance ? Why should he shrink from going to America, or prefer London to Philadelphia ? He had entered into a service that took no heed of such things.

But when he had parted from Lind and Molyneux, and got out into the sombre glare of the night-world of London, and when there was no further need for that forced composure, he began more clearly to recognize his position, and his heart grew heavy. This, then, was the end of those visions of loving companionship and constant and sustaining sympathy with which he had dared to fill the future. He had thought little of anything that might be demanded from him so long as he could anticipate Natalie's approval, and be rewarded with a single glance of gratitude from the proud, dark, beautiful eyes. What mattered it to him what became of himself, what circumstances surrounded them, so long as he and she were together ? But now a more terrible sacrifice than any he had dreamed of had to be made. The lady of love whom the Pilgrims had sworn to serve was proving herself inexorable indeed :

“ —Is she a queen, having great gifts to give ?
—Yea, these ; that whose hath seen her shall not live
Except to serve her sorrowing, with strange pain,
Travail and bloodshedding and bitterer tears ;
And when she bids die he shall surely die.
And he shall leave all things under the sky,
And go forth naked under sun and rain,
And work and wait and watch out all his years.”

When Lord Evelyn had asked him whether he was prepared to go to America *alone*, he had clasped the ring that Natalie had given him, and answered "Yes." But that was as a matter of theory. It was what he might do, in certain possible circumstances. Now that he had to face the reality, and bethink him of the necessity of taking Natalie's hand for the last time, his heart sank within him.

He walked on blindly through the busy streets, seeing nothing around him. His memory was going over the most trivial incidents connected with Natalie, as if every look of hers, every word she had uttered, was now become something inexpressibly precious. Were there not many things he could carry away with him to the land beyond the seas? No distance or time could rob him of the remembrance of that night at the opera—the scent of white rose—her look as she gave him the forget-me-nots. Then the beautiful shining day as they drew near to Dover, and her pride about England, and the loosened curls of hair that blew about her neck. On the very first evening on which he had seen her—she sitting at the table and bending over the zither—her profile touched by the rose-tinted light from the shade of the candle—the low, rich voice, only half heard, singing the old, familiar, tender *Lorelei*. He felt the very touch of her fingers on his arm when she turned to him with reproving eyes: "*Is that the way you answer an appeal for help?*" That poor devil of a Kirski—what had become of him? He would find out from Reitzei; and, before leaving England, would take care that something should be done for the luckless outcast. He should have cause to remember all his life-long that Natalie Lind had interfered in his behalf.

Without knowing well how he got there, Brand found himself in Curzon Street. He walked on, perhaps with some vague notion that he might meet Natalie herself, until he arrived at the house. It was quite dark; there was no light in any of the windows; Anneli had not even lit the gas-jet in the narrow hall. He turned away from the door that he felt was now barred against him forever, and walked back to Clarges Street.

Lord Evelyn was out; the man did not know when he would be home again. So Brand turned away from that door also, and resumed his aimless wanderings, busy with those pictures of the past. At length he got down to Buckingham Street, and almost mechanically made his way toward his own rooms.

He had reached his door, however, when he heard some one speaking within.

"I might have known," he said to himself. "That is so like Evelyn."

It was indeed Lord Evelyn, who was chatting familiarly with old Waters. But the moment Brand entered he ceased, and a look of anxiety, and even alarm, appeared instantly on the fine, sensitive, expressive face.

"What is the matter, Brand? Are you ill?"

"No," said the other, dropping into a chair; "only tired—and worried, perhaps. Waters, get me a biscuit and a glass of sherry. Now, when I think of it, I ought to feel tired—I have eaten nothing since eight o'clock this morning."

Lord Evelyn jumped to his feet.

"Come off at once, Brand. We will go up to the Strand and get you something to eat. Gracious goodness, it is nearly ten o'clock!"

"No, no, never mind. I have something to talk to you about, Evelyn."

"But why on earth had Waters no dinner waiting for you?"

"I did not tell him—I forgot. Never mind; I will have some supper by-and-by. I called on you, Evelyn, about half an hour ago; I might have known you would be here."

Lord Evelyn paused for a second or two, while Waters came in and went out again. Then he said,

"I can tell by your face, Brand, that something has happened."

"Nothing that I had not foreseen."

"Did you consent or refuse?"

"I refused."

"Well?"

"Then, as I knew he would, he suggested that I might as well get ready to start for America as soon as possible."

Brand was speaking in a light and scornful way; but his face was careworn, and his eyes kept turning to the windows and the dark night outside, as if they were looking at something far away.

"About Natalie?" Lord Evelyn asked.

"Oh, he was frank enough. He dropped all those round-about phrases about the great honor, and so forth. He was quite plain. 'Not to be thought of.'"

Lord Evelyn remained silent for some time.

"I am very sorry, Brand," he said at length; and then he continued with some hesitation—"Do you know—I have

been thinking that—that though it's a very extreme thing for a man to give up his fortune—a very extreme thing—I can quite understand how the proposal looked to you very monstrous at first—still, if you put that in the balance as against a man's giving up his native country and the woman whom he is in love with—don't you see—the happiness of people of so much more importance than a sum of money, however large—”

“My dear fellow,” said Brand, interrupting him, “there is no such alternative—there never was any such alternative. Do you not think I would rather give up twenty fortunes than have to go and bid good-bye to Natalie? It is not a question of money. I suspected before—I know now—that Lind never meant to let his daughter marry. He would not definitely say no to me while he thought I could be persuaded about this money business; as soon as I refused that, he was frank and explicit enough. I see the whole thing clearly enough now. Well, he has not altogether succeeded.”

His eye happened to light on the ring on his finger, and the frown on his face lifted somewhat.

“If I could only forget Lind; if I could forget why it was that I had to go to America, I should think far less of the pain of separation. If I could go to Natalie, and say, ‘Look at what we must do, for the sake of something greater than our own wishes and dreams,’ then I think I could bid her good-bye without much faltering; but when you know that it is unnecessary—that you are being made the victim of a piece of personal revenge—how can you look forward with any great enthusiasm to the new life that lies before you? That is what troubles me, Evelyn.”

“I cannot argue the matter with you,” his friend said, looking down, and evidently much troubled himself. “I cannot help remembering that it was I let you in for all this—”

“Don't say that, Evelyn,” Brand broke in, quickly. “Do you think I would have it otherwise? Once in America, I shall no doubt forget how I came to go there. I shall have something to do.”

“I—I was going to say that—that perhaps you are not quite fair to Lind. You impute motives that may not exist.”

Lord Evelyn flushed a little; it was almost as if he were excusing or defending one he had no particular wish to defend; but all the same, with some hesitation, he continued,

“Consider Lind's position. Mind, your reading of his conduct is only pure assumption. It is quite possible that he would be really and extremely surprised if he knew that

you fancied he had been allowing personal feelings to sway his decision. But suppose this—suppose he is honestly convinced that you would be of great service in America. He has seen what you can do in the way of patient persuading of people. I know he has plenty around him who can do the risky business—men who have been adventurous all their lives—who would like nothing better than to be commissioned to set up a secret printing-press next door to the Commissary of Police in St. Petersburg. I say he has plenty of people like that; but very few who have persistence and patience enough to do what you have been doing in the north of England. He told me so himself. Very well. Suppose he thinks that what you have been doing this man Molyneux can carry on? Suppose, in short, that if he had no daughter at all, he would be anxious to send you to the States?”

Brand nodded. There was no harm in letting his friend have his theory.

“Very well. Now suppose that, having this daughter, he would rather not have her marry. He says she is of great service to him; and his wish to have her with him always would probably exaggerate that service, unconsciously to himself, if it were proposed to take her away. That is only natural.”

Brand again assented.

“Very well. He discovers that you and she are attached to each other. Probably he does not consider it a very serious affair, so far; but he knows that if you remain in London it would probably become so. Now, Natalie is a girl of firm character; she is very gentle, but she is not a fool. If you remained in London she would probably marry you, whether her father liked it or not, if she thought it was right. He knows that; he knows that the girl is capable of acting on her own judgment. Now put the two things together. Here is this opportune service on which you can be sent. That, according to his view, will be a good thing of itself; it will also effectually prevent a marriage which he thinks would be inexpedient. Don't you see that there may be no personal revenge or malice in the whole affair? He may consider he is acting quite rightly, with regard to the best interests of everybody concerned.”

“I am sick of him, Evelyn—of hearing of him—of thinking of him,” Brand said, impatiently. “Come, let us talk of something else. I wish the whole business of starting for America were over, and I had only the future to think about.”

- "That is not likely," said Lord Evelyn, gently. "You cannot cut yourself away from everything like that. There will be *some* memories."

Waters here appeared with a tray, and speedily placed on the table a lobster, some oysters, and a bottle of Chablis.

"There you are, Evelyn; have some supper."

"Not unless you have some."

"By-and-by—"

"No, now."

So the two friends drew in their chairs.

"I have been thinking," said Lord Evelyn—with a slight flush, for he was telling a lie—"I have been thinking for some time back I should like to go to America for a year or two. There are some political phases I should like to study."

Brand looked at him.

"You never thought of it before to-night. But it is like you to think of it now."

"Oh, I assure you," said the other, hastily, "there are points of great interest in the political life of America that one could only properly study on the spot—hearing the various opinions, don't you know—and seeing how the things practically work. I should have gone long before now, but that I dreaded the passage across. When do you go?"

"It is not settled yet."

"What line shall you go by?"

"I don't know."

Lord Evelyn paused for a moment; then he said,

"I'll go with you, Brand."

Well, he had not the heart even to protest; for he thoroughly understood the generous friendship that had prompted such an offer. He might remonstrate afterward; now he would not. On the contrary, he began to speak of his experience of the various lines; of the delight of the voyage to any one not abnormally sensitive to sea-sickness; of the humors of the bagmen; of the occupations and amusements on board; of dolphins, fog-horns, icebergs, rope-quoits, grass-widows, and the chances of poker. It was all a holiday excursion, then? The two friends lit their cigars and went back to their arm-chairs. The tired and haggard look on George Brand's face had for the moment been banished.

But by-and-by he said, rather absently,

"I suppose, hereafter, Natalie and you will have many a talk over what has happened. And you will go there just as usual, and spend the evening, and hear her read, or listen to her singing with the zither. It seems strange. Perhaps she

will be able to forget altogether—to cut this unhappy episode out of her life, as it were.” Then he added, as if speaking to himself, “No, she is not likely to forget.”

Lord Evelyn looked up.

“In the mean time, does she know about your going?”

“I presume not—not yet. But I must see her and tell her unless, indeed, Lind should try to prevent that too. He might lay injunctions on her that she was not to see me again.”

“That is true,” his friend said. “He might command. But the question is whether she would obey. I have known Natalie Lind longer than you have. She is capable of thinking and acting for herself.”

Nothing further was said on this point; they proceeded to talk of other matters. It was perhaps a quarter of an hour afterward—close on eleven o’clock—that Waters knocked at the door and then came into the room.

“A letter for you, sir.”

A quick glance at the envelope startled him.

“How did you get it?” he said instantly.

“A girl brought it, sir, in a cab. She is gone again. There was no answer, she said.”

Waters withdrew. Brand hastily opened the letter, and read the following lines, written in pencil, apparently with a trembling hand:

“DEAREST,—I spent this evening with Madame Potecki. My father came for me, and on the way home has told me something of what has occurred. It was for the purpose of telling me that you and I must not meet again—never, never. My own, I cannot allow you to pass a single night, or a single hour, thinking such a thing possible. Have I not promised to you? When it is your wish to see me, come to me: I am yours. Good-night, and Heaven guard you!

“NATALIE.”

George Brand turned to his friend.

“This,” said he; but his lip trembled, and he stopped for a second. Then he continued: “This is a message from her, Evelyn. And I know what poor old Calabressa would say of it, if he were here. He would say: ‘This is what might have been expected from the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi!’”

“She knows, then?”

“Yes,” said he, still looking at the hastily written lines in pencil, “and it is as you imagined. Her father has told her

we must not see each other again, and she has refused to be bound by any such injunction. I rather fancy she thinks he must have conveyed the same intimation to me ; at all events, she has written at once to assure me that she will not break her promise to me. It was kindly meant ; was it not ? I wish Anneli had waited for a second."

He folded up the letter and put it in his pocket-book ; it was one more treasure he should carry with him to America. But when, later on, Evelyn had left, he took it out again, and re-read again and again the irregular, hurried, pencilled lines, and thought of the proud, quick, generous spirit that had prompted them. And was she still awake and thinking ? And could her heart hear, through the silence of the night, the message of love and gratitude that he sent her ? "*Good-night, and Heaven guard you !*" It had been a troubled and harassing day for him ; but this tender good-night message came in at the close of it like a strain of sweet music that he would carry with him into the land of dreams.

CHAPTER XXX.

SOME TREASURES.

THE next morning Natalie was sitting alone in the little dining-room, dressed ready to go out. Perhaps she had been crying a little by herself ; but at all events, when she heard the sound of some one being admitted at the front-door and coming into the passage, she rose, with a flush of pleasure and relief appearing on her pale and saddened face. It was Madame Potecki.

"Ah, it is so good of you to come early," said Natalie to her friend, with a kind of forced cheerfulness. "Shall we start at once ? I have been thinking and thinking myself into a state of misery ; and what is the use of that ?"

"Let me look at you," said the prompt little music-mistress, taking both her hands, and regarding her with her clear, shrewd blue eyes. "No ; you are not looking well. The walk will do you good, my dear. Come away, then."

But Natalie paused in the passage, with some appearance of embarrassment. Anneli was standing by the door.

"Remember this, Anneli ; if any one calls and wishes to see me—and particularly wishes to see me—you will not say, 'My mistress is gone out ;' you will say, 'My mistress is

gone to the South Kensington Museum with Madame Potecki.' Do you understand that, Anneli?"

"Yes, Fraulein; certainly."

Then they left, going by way of the Park. And the morning was fresh and bright; the energetic little Polish lady was more talkative and cheerful than ever; the girl with her had only to listen, with as much appearance of interest as was possible, considering that her thoughts were so apt to wonder away elsewhither.

"My dear, what a lovely morning for us to go and look at my treasures! The other day I was saying to myself, 'There is my adopted daughter Natalie, and I have not a farthing to leave her. What is the use of adopting a child if you have nothing to leave her?' Then I said to myself, 'Never mind; I will teach her my theory of living; that will make her richer than a hundred legacies will do.' Dear, dear! that was all the legacy my poor husband left to me."

She passed her hand over her eyes.

"Don't you ever marry a man who has anything to do with politics, my child. Many a time my poor Potecki used to say to me, 'My angel, cultivate contentment; you may have to live on it some day.'"

"And you have taken his advice, madame; you are very content."

"Why? Because I have my theory. They think that I am poor. It is poor Madame Potecki, who earns her solitary supper by 'One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four;' who has not a treasure in the world—except a young Hungarian lady, who is almost a daughter to her. Well, well; but you know my way of thinking, my dear, you laugh at it; I know you do. You say, 'That mad little Madame Potecki.' But some day I will convince you."

"I am willing to be taught now, madame—seriously. Is it not wise to be content?"

"I am more than content, my dear; I am proud, I am vain. When I think of all the treasures that belong to the public, and to me as one of the public—the Turner landscapes in the National Gallery; the books and statues in the British Museum; the bronzes and china and jewellery at South Kensington—do you not think, my dear, that I am thankful I have no paltry little collection in my own house that I should be ashamed of? Then look at the care that is taken of them. I have no risk. I am not disheartened for a day because a servant has broken my best piece of Nankin blue. I have no trouble and no thought; it is only when I have a little hol-

iday that I say to myself, 'Well, shall I go and see my Rembrandts? Or shall I look over my cases of Etruscan rings? Or shall I go and feast my eyes on the *bleu de roi* of a piece of jewelled Sevres?' Oh, my love!"

She clasped her hands in ecstasy. Her volubility had out-run itself and got choked.

"I will show you three vases," said she, presently, in almost a solemn way—"I will show you three vases, in white and brown crackle, and put all the color in the whole of my collection to shame. My dear, I have never seen in the world anything so lovely—the soft cream-white ground, the rich brown decoration—the beautiful, bold, graceful shape; and they only cost sixty pounds!—sixty pounds for three, and they are worth a kingdom! Why— But really, my dear Natalie, you walk too fast. I feel as if I were being marched off to prison!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" said the girl, laughing. "I am always forgetting; and papa scolds me often enough for it."

"Have you heard what I told you about those priceless vases in the South Kensington?"

"I am most anxious to see them, I assure you."

"My blue-and-white," Madame Potecki continued, seriously, "I am afraid is not always of the best. There are plenty of good pieces, it is true; but they are not the finest feature of the collection. Oh! the Benares brocades—I had forgotten them. Ah, my dear, these will make you open your eyes!"

"But don't you get bewildered, madame, with having to think of so many possessions?" said Natalie, respectfully.

"No," said the other, in a matter-of-fact way; "I take them one by one. I pay a morning call here, a morning call there, when I have no appointments, just to see that everything is going on well."

Presently she said,

"Ah, well, my dear, we are poor weak creatures. Here and there, in my wanderings I have met things that I almost coveted; but see what an impossible, monstrous collection they would make! Let me think, now. The Raphael at Dresden; two Titian portraits in the Louvre; the Venus of Milo—not the Medici one at all; I would not take it; I swear I would not accept it, that trivial little creature with the yellow skin!"

"My dear friend, the heavens will fall on you!" her companion exclaimed.

"Wait a moment," said the little music-mistress, reflective-

ly. "I have not completed my collection. There is a Holy Family of Botticelli's—I forget where I saw it. And the bust of the Empress Messalina in the Uffizi: did you ever notice it, Natalie?"

"No."

"Do not forget it when you are in Florence again. You won't believe any of the stories about her when you see the beautiful refined face; only don't forget to remark how flat the top of her head is. Well, where are we, my dear? The bronze head of the goddess in the Castellani collection: I would have that; and the fighting Temeraire. Will these do? But then, my dear, even if one had all these things, see what a monstrous collection they would make. What should I do with them in my lodgings, even if I had room? No; I must be content with what I have."

By this time they had got down into South Kensington and were drawing near one of Madame Potecki's great treasure houses.

"Then, you see, my dear Natalie," she continued, "my ownership of these beautiful things we are going to see is not selfish. It can be multiplied indefinitely. You may have it too; any one may have it, and all without the least anxiety!"

"That is very pleasant also," said the girl, who was paying less heed now. The forced cheerfulness that had marked her manner at starting had in great measure left her. Her look was absent; she blindly followed her guide through the little wicket, and into the hushed large hall.

The silence was grateful to her; there was scarcely any one in the place. While Madame Potecki busied herself with some catalogue or other, the girl turned aside into a recess, to look at a cast of the effigy on the tomb of Queen Eleanor of Castile. A tombstone stills the air around it. Even this gilt plaster figure was impressive; it had the repose of the dead.

But she had not been standing there for a couple of seconds when she heard a well-known voice behind her.

"Natalie!"

She knew. There was neither surprise nor shamefacedness in her look when she turned and saw George Brand before her. Her eyes were as fearless as ever when they met his; and they were glad, too, with a sudden joy; and she said, quickly,

"Ah, I thought you would come. I told Anneli."

"It was kind of you—and brave—to let me come to see you."

"Kind?" she said. "How could I do otherwise?"

"But you are looking tired, Natalie."

"I did not sleep much last night. I was thinking."

The tears started to her eyes; she impatiently brushed them aside.

"I know what you were thinking. That is why I came so early to see you. You were blaming yourself for what has happened. That is not right. You are not to blame at all. Do you think I gave you that promise for nothing?"

"You were always like that," she said in a low voice. "Very generous and unselfish. Yes, I—I—was miserable; I thought if you had never known me—"

"If I had never known you! You think that would be a desirable thing for me!—"

But at this moment the hurried, anxious, half-whispered conversation had to cease, for Madame Potecki came up. Nor was she surprised to find Mr. Brand there. On the contrary, she said that her time was limited, and that she could not expect other people to care for old porcelain as much as she did; and if Mr. Brand would take her dear daughter Natalie to see some pictures in the rooms up-stairs, she would come and find her out by-and-by.

"Not at all, dear madame," said Natalie, with some slight flush. "No. We will go with you to see the three wonderful vases."

So they went, and saw the three crackle vases, and many another piece of porcelain and enamel and bronze; but always the clever little Polish woman took care that she should be at some other case, so that she could not overhear what these two had to say to each other. And they had plenty to say.

"Why, Natalie, where is your courage? What is the going to America? It cannot be forever and ever."

"But even then," she said, in a low, hesitating voice. "If you were never to see me again, you would blame me for it all. You would regret."

"How can I regret that my life was made beautiful to me, if only for a time? It was worth nothing to me before. And you are forgetting all about the ring, and my promise to you."

This light way of talking did not at all deceive her. What had been torturing her all the night long was the fancy, the suspicion, that her father was sending her lover to America, not solely with a view to the work he should have to undertake there, but to insure a permanent separation between

herself and him. That was the cruel bit of it. And she more than ever admired the manliness of this man, because he would make no complaint to her. He had uttered no word of protest, for fear of wounding her. He did not mention her father to her at all; but merely treated this project of going to America as if it were a part of his duty that had to be cheerfully accepted.

"After I have once said good-bye to you Natalie" said he, "it will not be so bad for me. I shall have my work."

"When do you go?" she asked, with rather a white face.

"I don't know yet. It may be a matter of days. You will let me see you again, my darling—soon?"

"I shall be here every morning, if you wish it" she answered.

"To-morrow, then?"

"To-morrow, at eleven. Anneli will come with me. I should have waited in on the hope of seeing you this morning; but it was an old engagement with Madame Potecki. Ah, how good she is! Do you see how she pretends to be interested in those things?"

"I will send her a present of some old china before I leave England," said Brand.

"No, no," said Natalie, with a faint smile appearing on the sad face. "It would destroy her theory. She does not care for anything at home so long as she possesses these public treasures. She is very content. Indeed, she earns enough to be charitable. She has many poor dependents."

By-and-by Madame Potecki, with great evident reluctance, confessed that she had to return, as one of her pupils would be at her house by half-past twelve. But would not Mr. Brand take her dear adopted child to see some of the pictures? It was a pity that she should be dragged away, and so forth.

But Natalie promptly put an end to these suggestions by saying that she would prefer to return with Madame Potecki; and, it being now past twelve, as soon as they got outside she engaged a cab. George Brand saw them off; and then returned into the building. He wished to look again at the objects she had looked at, to recollect every word she had uttered; to recall the very tones in which she had spoken. And this place was so hushed and quiet.

Meanwhile, as the occupants of the cab were journeying northward, Natalie took occasion to say to her companion, with something of a heightened color,

"You must not imagine, dear madame, that I expected to

see Mr. Brand at the Museum when I promised to go with you."

"But what if you had expected, my child?" said the good-natured music-mistress. "What harm is there?"

"But this morning I did expect him to come, and that is why I left the message with Anneli," continued the girl. "Because, do you know, madame, he is going to America; and when he goes I may not see him for many years."

"My child!" the demonstrative little woman exclaimed, catching hold of the girl's hand.

But Natalie was not inclined to be sympathetic at this moment.

"Now I wish you, dear Madame Potecki," she continued in a firm voice, "to do me a favor. I would rather not speak to my father about Mr. Brand. I wish you to tell him for me that so long as Mr. Brand remains in England I shall continue to see him; and that as I do not choose he should come to my father's house, I shall see him as I saw him this morning."

"My love, my love, what a frightful duty! Is it necessary?"

"It is necessary that my father should know, certainly."

"But what responsibility!"

"You have no responsibility whatever. Anneli will go with me. All that I ask of you, dear Madame Potecki, is to take the message to my father. You will; will you not?"

"More than that I will do for you," said the little woman, boldly. "I see there is unhappiness; you are suffering, my child. Well, I will plunge into it; I will see your father: this cannot be allowed. It is a dangerous thing to interfere—who knows better than I? But to sit near you is to be inspired; to touch your hand is to gain the courage of a giant. Yes, I will speak to your father; all shall be put right."

The girl scarcely heard her.

"There is another thing I would ask of you," she said, slowly and wistfully, "but not here. May I come to you when the lesson is over?"

"At two: yes."

So it was that Natalie called on her friend shortly after two o'clock and was shown into the little parlor. She was rather pale. She sat down at one side of the table.

"I wished to ask your advice, dear Madame Potecki," she said, in a low voice, and with her eyes down. "Now you must suppose a case. You must suppose that—that two people love each other—better—better than anything else in the

world, and that they are ready to sacrifice a great deal for each other. Well, the man is ordered away! it is a banishment from his own country, perhaps forever; and he is very brave about it, and will not complain. Now you must suppose that the girl is very miserable about his going away, and blames herself; and perhaps—perhaps wishes—to do something to show she understands his nobleness—his devotion; and she would do anything in the world, Madame Potecki—to prove her love to him—”

“But, child, child, why do you tremble so?”

“I wish you to tell me, Madame Potecki—I wish you to tell me—whether—you would consider it unwomanly—unmaidenly—for her to go and say to him, ‘You are too brave and unselfish to ask me to go with you. Now I offer myself to you. If you must go, why not I—your wife?’”

Madame Potecki started up in great alarm.

“Natalie, what do you mean?”

“I only—wished to—to ask—what you would think.”

She was very pale, and her lips were tremulous; but she did not break down. Madame Potecki was apparently far more agitated than she was.

“My child, my child, I am afraid you are on the brink of some wild thing!”

“Is that that I have repeated to you what a girl ought to do?” Natalie said, almost calmly. “Do you think it is what my mother would have done, Madame Potecki? They have told me she was a brave woman.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN A GARDEN AT POSILIPO.

“—Prends mon cœur, me dit-elle,
Oui, mais à la chapelle,
Sois mon petit. . . .
—Plait-il
Ton petit?
—Sois mon petit mari!”

—It was Calabressa who was gayly humming to himself; and it was well that he could amuse himself with his *chansons* and his cigarettes, for his friend Edwards was proving anything but an attentive companion. The tall, near-sighted, blond-faced man from the British Museum was far too much

engrossed by the scene around him. They were walking along the quays at Naples; and it so happened that at this moment all the picturesque squalor and lazy life of the place were lit up by the glare reflected from a wild and stormy sunset. The tall, pink-fronted houses; the mules and oxen with their brazen yokes and tinkling bells; the fruit-sellers, and fish-sellers, and water-carriers, in costumes of many hues; the mendicant friars with their cloak and hood of russet-brown; the priests black and clean-shaven; the groups of women, swarthy of face, with head-dresses of red or yellow, clustered round the stalls; the children, in rags of brown, and scarlet, and olive-green, lying about the pavement as if artists had posed them there—all these formed a picture which was almost bewildering in its richness of color, and was no doubt rendered all the more brilliant because of the powerful contrast with the dark and driven sea. For the waters out there were racing in before a stiff breeze, and springing high on the fortresses and rocks; and the clouds overhead were seething and twisting, with many a sudden flash of orange; and then, far away beyond all this color and motion and change, rose the vast and gloomy bulk of Vesuvius, overshadowed and thunderous, as if the mountain were charged with a coming storm.

Calabressa grew impatient, despite his careless song.

“—Me seras tu fidele. . . .
 —Comme une tourterelle.
 —Eh bieu, ca va. . . .
 Ca va!
 —Ca me va!
 —Comme ca, ca me va!

—*Diable*, Monsieur Edouarts! You are very silent. You do not know where we are going, perhaps?”

Edwards started, as if he were waking from a reverie.

“Oh yes, Signor Calabressa,” said he, “I am not likely to forget that. Perhaps I think more seriously about it than you. To you it is nothing. But I cannot forget, you see, that you and I are practically conniving at a murder.”

“Hush, hush, my dear friend!” said Calabressa, glancing round. “Be discreet! And what a foolish phrase, too! You—you whose business is merely to translate; to preach; to educate a poor devil of a Russian—what have you to do with it? And to speak of murder! Bah! You do not understand the difference, then, between killing a man as an act of private anger and revenge, and executing a man for crimes

against society? My good friend Edouarts, you have lived all your life among books, but you have not learned any logic—no!”

Edwards was not inclined to go into any abstract argument.

“I will do what I have been appointed to do,” he said, curtly; “but that cannot prevent my wishing that it had not to be done at all.”

“And who knows?” said Calabressa, lightly. “Perhaps, if you are so fearful about your small share, your very little share—it is no more than that of the *garçon* who helps one on with his coat: is he accessory, too, if a rogue has to be punished?—is he responsible for the sentence, also, if he brushes the boots of the judge?—or the servant of the court who sweeps out the room, is he guilty if there is a miscarriage of justice? No, no; my dear friend Edouarts, do not alarm yourself. Then, I was saying, perhaps it may not be necessary, after all. You perceived, my friend, that when the proposal of his eminence the Cardinal was mentioned, the Secretary Granaglia smiled, and I, thoughtless, laughed. You perceived it, did you not?”

By this time they were in the Chiaja, beyond the Villa Reale; and there were fewer people about. Calabressa stopped and confronted his companion. For the purposes of greater emphasis, he rested his right elbow in the palm of his left hand, while his forefinger was at the point of his nose.

“What?” said he, in this striking attitude, “what if we were both fools—ha? The Secretary Granaglia and myself—what if we were both fools?”

Calabressa abandoned his pose, linked his arm within that of his companion, and walked on with him.

“Come, I will implant something in your mind. I will throw out a fancy; it may take root and flourish; if not, who is the worse? Now, if the Council were really to entertain that proposal of Zaccatelli?”

He regarded his friend Edouarts.

“You observed, I say, that Granaglia smiled: to him it was ludicrous. I laughed: to me it was farcical—the chatter of a *bavard*. The Pope become the patron of a secret society! The priests become our friends and allies! Very well, my friend; but listen. The little minds see what is absurd; the great minds are serious. Granaglia is a little devil of courage; but he is narrow; he is practical; he has no imagination. I: what am I?—careless, useless, also a *bavard*, if you will. But it occurred to me, after all, when I began to think—what a

bressa could not see who it was that come out to him ; he only knew that the stranger waited for him to pass on into the outer air.

"It is cooler here. To your business, friend Calabressa."

The moment Calabressa recognized this tall, military-looking man, with the closely cropped bullet-head and long silver-white mustache, he whipped off his cap, and said, anxiously,

"A thousand pardons, Excellency ! a thousand pardons ! Do I interrupt ? May not I see Fossati ?"

"It is unnecessary. There is much business to-night. One must breathe the air sometimes."

Calabressa for once had completely lost his *sang-froid*. He could not speak for stammering.

"I assure you, your Excellency, it is death to me to think that I interrupt you."

"But why did you come, then, my friend ? To the point."

"Zaccatelli," the other managed to get out.

"Well ?"

"There was a proposal. Some days ago I saw Granaglia."

"Well ?"

"Pardon me, Excellency. If I had known, not for worlds would I have called you—"

"Come, come my Calabressa," said the other, good-naturedly. "No more apologies. What is it you have to say ?—the proposal made by the Cardinal ? Yes ; we know about that."

"And it has not been accepted ?—the decree remains ?"

"You waste your breath, my friend. The decree remains, certainly. We are not children ; we do not play. What more, my Calabressa ?"

But Calabressa had to collect his thoughts. Then he said, slowly,

"It occurred to me when I was in England—there was a poor devil there who would have thrown away his life in a useless act of revenge—well—"

"Well, you brought him over here," said the other, interrupting him. "Your object ? Ah, Lind and you being old comrades ; and Lind appearing to you to be in a difficulty. But did Lind approve ?"

"Not quite," said Calabressa, still hesitating. "He allowed us to try. He was doubtful himself."

"I should have thought so," said the other, ironically. "No, good Calabressa ; we cannot accept the services of a maniac. The night has got dark ; I cannot see whether you are surprised. How do we know ? The man Kirski

has been twice examined—once in Venice, once this morning, when you went down to the *Luisa*; the reports the same. What! To have a maniac blundering about the gates, attracting every one's notice by his gibberish; then he is arrested with a pistol or a knife in his hand; he talks nonsense about some Madonna; he is frightened into a confession, and we become the laughing-stock of Europe! Impossible, impossible, my Calabressa: where were your wits? No wonder Lind was doubtful—”

“The man is capable of being taught,” said Calabressa, humbly.

“We need not waste more breath, my friend. To-night Lind will be reminded why it was necessary that the execution of this decree was intrusted to the English section: he must not send any Russian madman to compromise us.”

“Then I must take him back, your Excellency!”

“No; send him back—with the English scholar. You will remain in Naples, Calabressa. There is something stirring that will interest you.”

“I am at your service, Excellency.”

“Good-night, dear friend.”

The figure beside him had disappeared almost before he had time to return the salutation, and he was left to find his way down to the gate, taking care not to run unawares on one of the long cactus spines. He discovered Edwards precisely where he had left him.

“Ah, Monsieur Edouarts, now you may clap your hands—now you may shout an English ‘hurrah!’ For you, at all events, there is good news.”

“That project has been abandoned, then?” said Edwards, eagerly.

“No, no, no!” said Calabressa, loftily; as if he had never entertained such a possibility. “Do you think the Council is to be played with—is to be bribed by so many and so many lire? No, no. Its decree is inviolable.”

“Well, then?”

“Well, then, some stupidities of our Russian friend have saved you: they know everything, these wonderful people: they say, ‘No; we will not trust the affair to a madman.’ Do you perceive? What you have to do now is to take Kirski back to England.”

“And I am not wanted any longer?” said the other, with the same eagerness.

“I presume not. I am. I remain in Naples. For you,

you are free. Away to England ! I give you my blessing ; and to-night—to-night you will give me a bottle of wine."

But presently he added, as they still walked on,

" Friend Edouarts, do you think I should be humiliated because my little plan has been refused ? No : it was born of idleness. My freedom was new to me ; over in England I had nothing to do. And when Lind objected, I talked him over. *Peste*, if those fellows of Society had not got at the Russian, all might have been well."

" You will forgive my pointing out," said Edwards, in quite a facetious way, " that all would not have been so well with me, for one. I am very glad to be able to wash my hands of it. You shall have not only one but two bottles of wine with supper, if you please."

" Well, friend Edouarts, I bring you the good news, but I am not the author of it. No ; I must confess, I would rather have had my plan carried out. But what matter ? One does one's best from time to time—the hours go by—at the end comes sleep, and no one can torment you more."

They walked on for a time in silence. And now before them lay the wonderful sight of Naples ablaze with a dusky yellow radiance in the dark ; and far away beyond the most distant golden points, high up in the black deeps of the sky, the constant, motionless, crimson glow of Vesuvius told them where the peaks of the mountain, themselves unseen towered above the sea.

By-and-by they plunged into the great murmuring city.

" You are going back to England, Monsieur Edouarts. You will take Kirski to Mr. Brand ; he will be reinstated in his work ; Englishmen do not forget their promises. Then I have another little commission for you."

He went into one of the small jeweller's shops ; and, after a great deal of haggling—for his purse was not heavy, and he knew the ways of his countrymen—he bought a necklace of pink coral. It was carefully wrapped in wool and put into a box. Then they went outside again.

" You will give this little present, my good friend Edouarts—you will take it, with my compliments, to my beautiful, noble child Natalie ; and you will tell her that it did not cost much, but it is only a message—to show her that Calabressa still thinks of her, and loves her always."

SUNRISE.—PART II.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FRIEND AND SWEETHEART.

MADAME POTECKI was a useful enough adviser in the small and ordinary affairs of every-day life, but face to face with a great emergency she became terrified and helpless.

"My dear, my dear," she kept repeating, in a flurried sort of way, "you must not do anything rash—you must not do anything wild. Oh, my dear, take care! it is so wicked for children to disobey their parents!"

"I am no longer a child, Madame Potecki; I am a woman: I know what seems to me just and unjust; and I only wish to do right." She was now quite calm. She had mastered that involuntary tremulousness of the lips. It was the little Polish lady who was agitated.

"My dear Natalie, I will go to your father. I said I would go—even with your message—though it is a frightful task. But how can I tell him that you have this other project in your mind? Oh, my dear, be cautious! don't do anything you will have to repent of in after-years!"

"You need not tell him, dear Madame Potecki, if you are alarmed," said the girl. "I will tell him myself, when I have come to a decision. So you cannot say what one ought to do in such circumstances? You cannot tell me what my mother, for example, would have done in such a case?"

"Oh, I can; I can, my dear," said the other, eagerly. "At least I can tell you what is best and safest. Is it not for a girl to go by her father's advice—her father's wishes? Then she is safe. Anything else is wild, dangerous. My dear, you are far too impulsive. You do not think of consequences. It is all the affair of the moment with you, and how you can do some one you love a kindness at the instant. Your heart is warm, and you are quick to act. All the more reason, I say, that you should go by some one else's judgment; and who can guide you better than your own father?"

"I know already what my father wishes," said Natalie.

"Then why not go by that, my dear? Be sure it is the safest. Do you think I would take it on me to say otherwise? Ah, my dear child, romance is very beautiful at your age; but one may sacrifice too much for it."

"It is not a question of romance at all," said Natalie, looking down. "It is a question of what it is right that a girl

should do, in faithfulness to one whom she loves. But perhaps it is better not to argue it, for one sees so differently at different ages. And I am very grateful to you, dear Madame Potecki, for agreeing to take that message to my father; but I will tell him myself."

She rose. The little woman came instantly and caught her by both hands.

"Is my child going to quarrel with me because I am old and unsympathetic?"

"Oh no; do not think that!" said Natalie, quickly.

"What you say is quite true, my dear; different ages see differently. When I was at your age, perhaps I was as liable as anyone to let my heart get the better of my head. And do I regret it?" The little woman sighed. "Many a time they warned me against marrying one who did not stand well with the authorities. But I—I had my opinions, too; I was a patriot, like the rest. We were all mad with enthusiasm. Ah, the secret meetings in Warsaw!—the pride of them!—we girls would not marry one who was not a patriot. But that is all over now; and here am I an old woman, with nothing left but my old masters, and my china, and my 'One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four.'"

Here a knock outside warned Natalie that she must leave, another pupil, no doubt, having arrived; and so she bade good-bye to her friend, not much enlightened or comforted by her counsel.

That evening Mr. Lind brought Beratinsky home with him to dinner—an unusual circumstance, for at one time Beratinsky had wished to become a suitor for Natalie's hand, and had had that project very promptly knocked on the head by Lind himself. Thereafter he had come but seldom to the house, and never without a distinct invitation. On this evening the two men talked almost exclusively between themselves, and Natalie was not sorry to be allowed to remain an inattentive listener. She was thinking of other things.

When Beratinsky had gone, Lind turned to his daughter, and said to her pleasantly,

"Well, Natalie, what have you been about to-day?"

"First of all," said she, regarding him with those fearless eyes of hers, "I went to South Kensington Museum with Madame Potecki. Mr Brand was there."

His manner changed instantly.

"By appointment?" he said, sharply.

"No," she answered. "I thought he would call here, and I told Anneli where we had gone."

Lind betrayed no expression of annoyance. He only said, coldly,

"Last night I told you it was my wish that he and you should have no further communication with each other."

"Yes ; but is it reasonable, is it fair, is it possible, papa ?" she said, forgetting for a moment her forced composure. "Do you think I can forget why he is going away ?"

"Apparently you do not know why he is going away," her father said. "He is going to America because his duty commands that he should ; because he has work to do there of more importance than sentimental entanglements in this country. He understands himself the necessity of his going."

The girl's cheeks burnt red, and she sat silent. How could she accuse her own father of prevarication ? But the crisis was a momentous one.

"You forget, papa," she said at length, in a low voice, "that when you returned from abroad and got Mr. Brand's letter, you came to me. You said that if there was any further question of a—a marriage—between Mr. Brand and myself, you would have to send him to America. I was to be the cause of his banishment."

"I spoke hastily—in anger," her father said, with some impatience. "Quite apart from any such question, Mr. Brand knows that it is of great importance some one like himself should go to Philadelphia ; and at the moment I don't see any one who could do as well. Have you anything further to say ?"

"No, papa—except good night." She kissed him on the forehead and went away to her own room.

That was a night of wild unrest for Natalie Lind. It was her father himself who had represented to her all that banishment from his native country meant to an Englishman ; and in her heart of hearts she believed that it was through her this doom had befallen George Brand. She knew he would not complain. He professed to her that it was only in the discharge of an ordinary duty he was leaving England : others had suffered more for less reason ; it was nothing ; why should she blame herself ? But all the same, through this long, restless, agonizing night she accused herself of having driven him from his country and his friends, of having made an exile of him. And again and again she put before herself the case she had submitted to Madame Potecki ; and again and again she asked herself what her own mother would have done, with her lover going away to a strange land.

In the morning, long before it was light, and while as yet she had not slept for a second, she rose, threw a dressing-gown round her, lit the gas, and went to the little escritoire that stood by the window. Her hand was trembling when she sat down to write, but it was not with the cold. There was a proud look on her face. This was what she wrote:

"MY LOVER AND HUSBAND,—You are going away from your own country, perhaps forever; and I think it is partly through me that all this has happened. What can I do? Only this; that I offer to go with you, if you will take me. I am your wife; why should you go alone?"

There was no signature. She folded the paper, and placed it in an envelope, and carefully locked it up. Then she put out the light and went back to bed again, and fell into a sound, happy, contented sleep—the untroubled sleep of a child.

Then in the morning how bright and light-hearted she was!

Anneli could not understand this change that had suddenly come over her young mistress. She said little, but there was a happy light on her face; she sung "*Du Schwert an meiner Linken*" in snatches, as she was dressing her hair; and she presented Anneli with a necklace of Turkish silver coins.

She was down at South Kensington Museum considerably before eleven o'clock. She idly walked Anneli through the various rooms, pointing out to her this and that; and as the little Dresden maid had not been in the Museum before, her eyes were wide open at the sight of such beautiful things. She was shown masses of rich tapestry and cases of Japanese lacquer-work; she was shown collections of ancient jewellery and glass; she went by sunny English landscapes, and was told the story of solemn cartoons. In the midst of it all George Brand appeared; and the little German girl, of her own accord, and quite as deftly as Madame Potecki, devoted herself to the study of some screens of water-colors, just as if she were one of the Royal Academy pupils.

"We have been looking over Madame Potecki's treasures once more," said Natalie. He was struck by the happy brightness of her face.

"Ah, indeed!" said he; and he went and brought a couple of chairs, that together they might regard, if they were so minded, one of those vast cartoons. "Well, I have good news, Natalie. I do not start until a clear week hence.

So we shall have six mornings here—six mornings all to ourselves. Do you know what that means to me?"

She took the chair he offered her. She did not look appalled by this intelligence of his early departure.

"It means six more days of happiness: and do you not think I shall look back on them with gratitude? And there is not to be a word said about my going. No; it is understood that we cut off the past and the future for these six days. We are here; we can speak to each other; that is enough."

"But how can one help thinking of the future?" said she, with a mock mournfulness. "You are going away alone."

"No, not quite alone."

She looked up quickly.

"Why, you know what Evelyn is—the best-hearted of friends," he said to her. "He insists on going over to America with me, and even talks of remaining a year or two. He pretends to be anxious to study American politics."

He could not understand why she laughed—though it was a short, quick, hysterical laugh, very near to tears.

"You remind me of one of Mr. Browning's poems," she said, half in apology. "It is about a man who has a friend and a sweetheart. You don't remember it, perhaps?"

He thought for a moment.

"The fact is," he said, "that when I think of Browning's poems, all along the line of them, there are some of them seem to burn like fire, and I cannot see the others."

"This is a very modest little one," said she. "It is a poor poet starving in a garret; and he tells you he has a friend beyond the sea; and he knows that if he were to fall ill, and to wake up out of his sickness, he would find his friend there, tending him like the gentlest of nurses, even though he got nothing but grumblings about his noisy boots. And the—the poor fellow—"

She paused for a second.

"He goes on to tell about his sweetheart—who has ruined him—to whom he has sacrificed his life and his peace and fame—and what would she do? He says,

"She
—I'll tell you—calmly would decree
That I should roast at a slow fire,
If that would compass her desire
And make her one whom they invite
To the famous ball to-morrow night."

That is—the difference—between a friend and a sweetheart—”

He did not notice that she spoke rather uncertainly, and that her eyes were wet.

“What do you mean, Natalie?”

“That it is a good thing for you that you have a friend. There is one, at all events—who will—who will not let you go away alone.”

“My darling!” he said, “what new notion is this you have got into your head? You do not blame yourself for that too? Why, you see, it is a very simple thing for Lord Evelyn, who is an idle man, and has no particular ties binding him, to spend a few months in the States; and when he once finds out that the voyage across is one of the pleasantest holidays a man can take, I have no doubt I shall see him often enough. Now, don’t let us talk any more about that—except this one point. Have you promised your father that you will not write to me?”

“Oh no; how could I?”

“And may I write to you?”

“I shall live from week to week expecting your letters,” she said simply.

“Then we shall not say another word about it,” said he, lightly. “We have six days to be together: no one can rob us of them. Come, shall we go and have a look at the English porcelain that is on this floor? We have whole heaps of old Chelsea and Crown Derby and that kind of thing at the Beeches: I think I must try and run down there before I go, and send you some. What use is it to me?”

“Oh no, I hope you won’t do that,” she said quickly, as she rose.

“You don’t care about it, perhaps?”

She seemed embarrassed for a moment.

“For old china?” she said, after a moment. “Oh yes, I do. But—but—I think you may find something happen that would make it unnecessary—I mean it is very kind of you—but I hope you will not think of sending me any.”

“What do you mean? What is about to happen?”

“It is all a mystery and a secret as yet,” she said, with a smile. She seemed so much more light-hearted than she had been the day before.

Then, as they walked by those cases, and admired this or that, she would recur to this forth-coming departure of his, despite of him. And she was not at all sad about it. She was curious; that was all. Was there any difficulty in getting

a cabin at short notice? It was from Liverpool the big steamers sailed, was it not? And it was a very different thing, she understood, travelling in one of those huge vessels, and crossing the Channel in a little cockle-shell. He would no doubt make many friends on board. Did single ladies ever make the voyage? Could a single lady and her maid get a cabin to themselves? It would not be so very tedious, if one could get plenty of books. And so forth, and so forth. She did not study the Chelsea shepherdesses very closely.

"I'll tell you what I wish you would do, Natalie," said he.

"I will do it," she answered.

"When Lord Evelyn comes back—some day I wish you would take Anneli with you for a holiday—and Evelyn would take you down to have a look over the Beeches. You could be back the same night. I should like you to see my mother's portrait."

She did not answer.

"Will you do that?"

"You will know before long," she said, in a low voice, "why I need not promise that to you. But that, or anything else I am willing to do, if you wish it."

The precious moments sped quickly. And as they walked through the almost empty rooms—how silent these were, with the occasional foot-falls on the tiled floors, and once or twice the distant sounding of a bell outside!—again and again he protested against her saying another word about his going away. What did it matter? Once the pain of parting was over, what then? He had a glad work before him. She must not for a moment think she had anything to do with it. And he could not regret that he had ever met her, when he would have these six mornings of happy intercommunion to think over, when the wide seas separated them?

"Natalie," said he, reproachfully, "do you forget the night you and I heard *Fidelio* together? And you think I shall regret ever having seen you."

She smiled to herself. Her hand clasped a certain envelope that he could not see.

Then the time came for their seeking out Anneli. But as they were going through the twilight of a corridor she stopped him, and her usually frank eyes were downcast. She took out that envelope.

"Dearest," she said, almost inaudibly, "this is something I wish you to read after Anneli and I am gone. I think you will—you will not misunderstand me. If you think—it is—it is too bold, you will remember that I have—no mother to

advise me; and—and you will be kind, and not answer. Then I shall know.”

Ten minutes thereafter he was standing alone, in the broad daylight outside, reading the lines she had written early that morning, and in every one of them he read the firm and noble character of the woman he loved. He was almost bewildered by the proud-spirited frankness of her message to him; and involuntarily he thought of the poor devil of a poet in the garret who spoke of his faithful friend and his worthless mistress.

“One is fortunate indeed to have a friend like Evelyn,” he said to himself. “But when and has, besides that, the love of a woman like this—then the earth holds something worth living for.”

He looked at the brief, proud, pathetic message again—“*I am your wife: why should you go alone?*” It was Natalie herself speaking in every word.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

INTERVENTION.

THE more that Madame Potecki thought over the communication made to her by Natalie, the more alarmed she became. Her pupils received but a very mechanical sort of guidance that afternoon. All through the “One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four” she was haunted by an uneasy consciousness that her protest had not been nearly strong enough. The girl had not seemed in the least impressed by her counsel. And suppose this wild project were indeed carried out, might not she, that is, Madame Potecki, be regarded as an accomplice if she remained silent and did not intervene?

On the other hand, although she and Ferdinand Lind were friends of many years’ standing, she had never quite got over a certain fear of him. She guessed pretty well what underlay that pleasant, plausible exterior of his. And she was not at all sure that, if she went to Mr. Lind and told him that in such and such circumstances his daughter meant to go to America as the wife of George Brand, the first outburst of his anger might not fall on herself. She was an intermeddler. What concern of hers was it? He might even accuse her of having connived at the whole affair, especially during his absence in Philadelphia.

But after all, the little Polish lady was exceedingly fond of this girl ; and she resolved to go at all hazards and see whether something could not be done to put matters straight. She would call at the chambers in Lisle Street, and make sure of seeing Mr. Lind alone. She would venture to remind him that his daughter was grown up—a woman, not to be treated as a child. As she had been altogether on the father's side in arguing with Natalie, so she would be altogether on the daughter's side in making these representations to Mr. Lind. Perhaps some happy compromise would result.

She was, however, exceedingly nervous when, on the following afternoon, she called at Lisle Street, and was preceded up-stairs by the stout old German. In the room into which she was shown Reitzei was seated. Reitzei received her very graciously ; they were old friends. But although Madame Potecki on ordinary occasions was fond of listening to the sound of her own voice, she seemed now quite incapable of saying anything. Reitzei had been fortunate enough to hear the new barytone sing at a private house on the previous evening ; she did not even ask what impression had been produced.

Then Mr. Lind came into the room, and Reitzei left.

"How do you do, Madame Potecki?" said he, somewhat curtly.

She took it that he was offended because she had come on merely private affairs to his place of business ; and this did not tend to lessen her embarrassment. However, she made a brave plunge.

"You are surprised," she said, "to find me calling upon you here, are you not? Yes ; but I will explain. You see, my dear friend, I wished to see you alone—"

"Yes, yes, Madame Potecki ; I understand. What is your news?"

"It is—about Natalie," she managed to say ; and then all the methods of beginning that she had studied went clean out of her mind ; and she was reduced to an absolute silence.

He did not seem in the least impatient.

"Yes ; about Natalie?" he repeated, taking up a paper-knife, and beginning to write imaginary letters on the leather of the desk before him.

"You will say to me, 'Why do you interfere?'" the little woman managed to say at last. "Meddlers do harm ; they are not thanked. But then, my dear friend, Natalie is like my own child to me ; for her what would I not do?"

Mr. Lind could not fail to see that his visitor was very

nervous and agitated : perhaps it was to give her time to compose herself that he said, leisurely,

"Yes, Madame Potecki ; I know that you and she are great friends ; and it is a good thing that the child should have some one to keep her company ; perhaps she is a little too much alone. Well, what do you wish to say about her ? You run no risk with me. You will not be misunderstood. I know you are not likely to say anything unkind about Natalie."

"Unkind !" she exclaimed ; and now she had recovered herself somewhat. "Who could do that ? Oh no, my dear friend ; oh no !"

Here was another awkward pause.

"My dear Madame Potecki," said Mr. Lind, with a smile, "shall I speak for you ? You do not like to say what you have come to say. Shall I speak for you ? This is it, is it not ? You have become aware of that entanglement that Natalie has got into. Very well. Perhaps she has told you. Perhaps she has told you also that I have forbidden her to have any communication with—well, let us speak frankly—Mr. Brand. Very well. You go with her to the South Kensington Museum ; you meet Mr. Brand there. Naturally you think if that comes to my ears I shall suspect you of having planned the meeting ; and you would rather come and assure me that you had nothing to do with it. Is it so ?"

"My dear friend," said Madame Potecki, quickly, "I did not come to you about myself at all ! What am I ? What matters what happens to an old woman like me ? It is not about myself, it is about Natalie that I have come to you. Ah, the dear, beautiful child !—how can one see her unhappy, and not try to do something ? Why should she be unhappy ? She is young, beautiful, loving ; my dear friend, do you wonder that she has a sweetheart ?—and one who is so worthy of her, too : one who is not selfish, who has courage, who will be kind to her. Then I said to myself, 'Ah, what a pity to have father and daughter opposed to each other !' Why might not one step in and say, 'Come, and be friends. You love each other : do not have this coldness that makes a young heart so miserable !' "

She had talked quickly and eagerly at last ; she was trembling with excitement ; she had her eyes fixed on his face to catch the first symptom of acquiescence.

But, on the contrary, Mr. Lind remained quite impassive, and he said, coldly,

"This is a different matter altogether, Madame Potecki.

I do not blame you for interfering ; but I must tell you at once that your interference is not likely to be of much use. You see, there are reasons which I cannot explain to you, but which are very serious, why any proposal of marriage between Mr. Brand and Natalie is not to be entertained for a moment. The thing is quite impossible. Very well. She knows this ; she knows that I wish all communication between them to cease ; nevertheless, she says she will see him every day until he goes. How can you wonder that she is unhappy ? Is it not her own doing ?”

“ If she was in reality my child, that is not the way I would speak,” said the little woman, boldly.

“ Unfortunately, my dear Madame Potecki,” said Mr. Lind, blandly, “ I cannot, as I say, explain to you the reasons which make such a marriage impossible, or you yourself would say it was impossible. Very well, then. If you wish to do a service to your friend Natalie—if you wish to see her less unhappy, you know what advice to give her. A girl who perseveres in wilful disobedience is not likely to be very contented in her mind.”

Madame Potecki sat silent and perplexed. This man seemed so firm, so reasonable, so assured, it was apparently hopeless to expect any concession from him. And yet what was the use of her going away merely to repeat the advice she had already given ?

“ And in any case,” he continued, lightly, “ it is not an affair for you to be deeply troubled about, my dear Madame Potecki ; on the contrary, it is a circumstance of little moment. If Natalie chooses to indulge this sentiment—well, the fate of empires does not hang on it, and in a little while it will be all right. Youth soon recovers from small disappointments ; the girl is not morbid or melancholy. Moreover, she has plenty to occupy her mind with : do not fear that she will be permanently unhappy.”

All this gave Natalie’s friend but scant consolation. She knew something of the girl, she knew it was not a light matter that had made her resolve to share banishment with her lover rather than that he should depart alone.

“ Yes, she is acting contrary to my wishes,” continued Mr. Lind, who saw that his visitor was anxious and chagrined. “ But why should you vex yourself with that, my dear madame ?—why, indeed ? It is only for a few days. When Mr. Brand leaves for America, then she will settle down to her old ways. This episode of sentiment will soon be forgotten. Do not

fear for your friend Natalie ; she has a healthy constitution ; she is not likely to sigh away her life."

"But you do not understand, Mr. Lind!" Madame Potecki exclaimed suddenly. "You do not understand. When he leaves for America, there is to be an end? No! You are not aware, then, that if he goes to America, Natalie will go also?"

She had spoken quickly, breathlessly, not taking much notice of her words, but she was appalled by the effect they produced. Lind started, as if he had been struck; and for a second, as he regarded her, the eyes set under the heavy brows burnt like coals, and she noticed a curious paleness in his face, especially in the lips. But this lasted only for an instant. When he spoke, he was quite calm, and was apparently considering each word.

"Are you authorized to bring me this message?" he said, slowly.

"Oh no; oh no!" the little woman exclaimed. "I assure you, my dear friend, I came to you because I thought something was about to happen—something that might be prevented. Ah, you don't know how I love that darling child; and to see her unhappy, and resolved, perhaps, to make some great mistake in her life, how could I help interfering?"

"So," continued Lind, apparently weighing every word, "this is what she is bent on! If Brand goes to America, she will go with him?"

"I—I—am afraid so," stammered Madame Potecki. "That is what I gathered from her—though it was only an imaginary case she spoke of. But she was pale, and trembling, and how could I stand by and not do something?"

He did not answer; his lips were firm set. Unconsciously he was pressing the point of the paper-knife into the leather; it snapped in two. He threw the pieces aside, and said, with a sudden lightness of manner,

"Ah, well, my dear madame, you know young people are sometimes very headstrong, and difficult to manage. We must see what can be done in this case. You have not told Natalie you were coming to me?"

"No. She asked me at first; then she said she would tell you herself."

He regarded her for a second.

"There is no reason why you should say you have been here?"

"Perhaps not, perhaps not," Madame Potecki said, doubt-

fully. "No; there is no necessity. But if one were sure that the dear child were to be made any happier—"

She did not complete the sentence.

"I think you may leave the whole affair in my hands, my dear Madame Potecki," said Lind, in his usual courteous fashion. He spoke, indeed, as if it were a matter of the most trifling importance. "I think I can promise you that Natalie shall not be allowed to imperil the happiness of her life by taking any rash steps. In the mean time, I am your debtor that you have come and told me. It was considerate of you, Madame Potecki; I am obliged to you."

The little woman was practically dismissed. She rose, still doubtful, and hesitated. But what more could she say?

"I am not to tell her, then?" she said.

"If you please, not."

When he had graciously bowed her out, he returned to his seat at the desk; and then the forced courtesy of his manner was abandoned. His brows gathered down; his lips were again firm set; he bent one of the pieces of the paper-knife until that snapped too; and when some one knocked at the door, he answered sharply in German.

It was Gathorne Edwards who entered.

"Well, you have got back?" he said, with but scant civility. "Where is Calabressa?"

The tall, pale, stooping man looked round with some caution.

"There is no one—no one but Reitzei," said Lind, impatiently.

"Calabressa is detained in Naples—the General's orders," said the other, in rather a low voice. "I did not write—I thought it was not safe to put anything on paper; more especially as we discovered that Kirski was being watched."

"No wonder," said Lind, scornfully. "A fool of a madman being taken about by a fool of a mountebank!"

Edwards stared at him. Surely this man, who was usually the most composed, and impenetrable, and suave of men, must have been considerably annoyed thus to give way to a petulant temper.

"But the result, Edwards: well?"

"Refused!"

Lind laughed sardonically.

"Who could have doubted? Of course the council do not think that I approved of that mad scheme?"

"At all events, sir," said Edwards, submissively, "you permitted it."

"Permitted it ! Yes ; to please old Calabressa, who imagines himself a diplomatist. But who could have doubted what the end would be ? Well, what further ?"

"I understand that a message is on its way to you from the council," said the other, speaking in still lower tones, "giving further instructions. They consider it of great importance that—it—should be done by one of the English section ; so that no one may imagine it arises from a private revenge."

Lind was toying with one of the pieces of the broken paper-knife.

"Zaccatelli has had the warning," Edwards continued. "Granaglia took it. The Cardinal is mad with fright—will do anything."

Lind seemed to rouse himself with an effort.

"I beg your pardon, friend Edwards. I did not hear. What were you saying ?"

"I was saying that the Cardinal had had the decree announced to him, and is mad with fear, and he will do anything. He offers thirty thousand lire a year ; not only that, but he will try to get his Holiness to give his countenance to the Society. Fancy, as Calabressa says, what the world would say to an alliance between the Vatican and the SOCIETY OF THE SEVEN STARS !"

Lind seemed incapable of paying attention to this new visitor, so absorbed was he in his own thoughts. He had again to rouse himself forcibly.

"Yes," he said ; "you were saying, friend Edwards, that the Starving Cardinal had become aware of the decree. Yes ; well, then ?"

"Did you not hear, sir ? He thinks there should be an alliance between the Vatican and the Society."

"His Eminence is jocular, considering how near he is to the end of his life," said Lind, absently.

"Further," Edwards continued, "he has sent back the daughter of old De Bedros, who, it seems, first claimed the decree against him ; and he is to give her a dowry of ten thousand lire when she marries. But all these promises and proposals do not seem to have weighed much with the council."

Here Edwards stopped. He perceived plainly that Lind—who sat with his brows drawn down, and a sombre look on his face—was not listening to him at all. Presently Lind rose, and said,

"My good Edwards, I have some business of serious importance to attend to at once. Now you will give me the re-

port of your journey some other time. To-night—at nine o'clock?"

"Yes, sir; if that will suit you."

"Can you come to my house in Curzon Street at nine?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Very well. I am your debtor. But stay a moment. Of course, I understand from you that nothing that has happened interferes with the decree against our excellent friend the Cardinal?"

"So it appears."

"The Council are not to be bought over by idle promises?"

"Apparently not."

"Very well. Then you will come to-night at nine; in my little study there will be no interruption: you can give me all the details of your holiday. Ha, my friend Edwards," he added more pleasantly, as he opened the door for his visitor, "would it not be better for you to give up that Museum altogether, and come over to us? Then you would have many a pleasant little trip."

"I suspect the Museum is most likely to give me up," said Edwards, with a laugh, as he descended the narrow twilight stairs.

Then Lind returned to his desk, and sat down. A quarter of an hour afterward, when Reitzei came into the room, he found him still sitting there, without any papers whatsoever before him. The angry glance that Lind directed to him as he entered told him that the master did not wish to be disturbed; so he picked up a book of reference by way of excuse, and retreated into the farther room, leaving Lind once more alone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN ENCOUNTER

THIS was an October morning, in the waning of the year; and yet so bright and clear and fresh was it, even in the middle of London, that one could have imagined the spring had returned. The world was full of a soft diffused light, from the pale clouds sailing across the blue to the sheets of silver widening out on the broad bosom of the Thames; but here and there the sun caught some shining surface—the lip of a marble fountain, the glass of a lamp on the Embankment, or

the harness of some merchant-prince's horses prancing into town—and these were sharp jewel-like gleams amidst the vague general radiance. The air was sweet and clear; the white steam blown from the engines on Hungerford Bridge showed that the wind was westerly. Two lovers walked below, in the Embankment gardens, probably listening but little to the murmur of the great city around them. Surely the spring had come again, and youth and love and hope! The solitary occupant of this chamber that overlooked the gardens and the shining river did not stay to ask why his heart should be so full of gladness, why this beautiful morning should yield him so much delight. He was thinking chiefly that on such a morning Natalie would be abroad soon; she loved the sunlight and the sweet air.

It was far too fine a morning, indeed, to spend in a museum, even with all Madame Potecki's treasures spread out before one. So, instead of going to South Kensington, he went straight up to Curzon Street. Early as he was, he was not too early, for he was leisurely walking along the pavement when, ahead of him, he saw Natalie and her little maid come forth and set out westward. He allowed them to reach the park gates; then he overtook them. Anneli fell a little way behind.

Now, whether it was the brightness of the morning had raised her spirits, or that she had been reasoning herself into a more courageous frame of mind, it was soon very clear that Natalie was not at all so anxious and embarrassed as she had shown herself the day before when they parted.

"There was no letter from you this morning," she said, with a smile, though she did not look up into his face. "Then I have offered myself to you, and am refused?"

"How could I write?" he said. "I tried once or twice, and then I saw I must wait until I could tell you face to face all that I think of your bravery and your goodness. And now that I see you Natalie, it is not a bit better: I can't tell you; I am so happy to be near you, to be beside you, and hear your voice, that I don't think I can say anything at all."

"I am refused, then?" said she, shyly.

"Refused!" he exclaimed. "There are some things one cannot refuse—like the sunshine. But do you know what a terrible sacrifice you are making?"

"It is you, then, who are making no sacrifice at all," she said, reproachfully. "What do I sacrifice more than every girl must sacrifice when she marries? England is not my

home as it is your home ; we have lived everywhere ; I have no childhood's friends to leave, as many a girl has."

"Your father—"

"After a little while my father will scarcely miss me ; he is too busy."

But presently she added,

"If you had remained in England I should never have been your wife."

"Why?" he said with some surprise.

"I should never have married against my father's wishes," she said, thoughtfully. "No. My promise to you was that I would be your wife, or the wife of no one. I would have kept that promise. But as long as we could have seen each other, and been with each other from time to time, I don't think I could have married against my father's wish. Now it is quite different. Your going to America has changed it all. Ah, my dear friend, you don't know what I suffered one or two nights before I could decide what was right for me to do!"

"I can guess," he said, in a low voice, in answer to that brief sigh of hers.

Then she grew more cheerful in manner.

"But that is all over ; and now, am I accepted? I think you are like Naomi : it was only when she saw that Ruth was very determined to go with her that she left off protesting. And I am to consider America as my future home? Well, at all events, one will be able to breathe freely there. It is not a country weighed down with standing armies and conscriptions and fortifications. How could one live in a town like Coblenz, or Metz, or Brest? The poor wretches marching this way and marching that—you watch them from your hotel window—the young men and the middle-aged men—and you know that they would rather be away at their farms, or in their factories, or saw-pits, or engine-houses, working for their wives and children—"

"Natalie," said he, "you are only half a woman : you don't care about military glory."

"It is the most mean, the most cruel and contemptible thing under the sun!" she said, passionately. "What is the quality that makes a great hero—a great general—nowadays? Courage? Not a bit. It is callousness!—an absolute indifference to the slaughtering of human lives! You sit in your tent—you sit on horseback—miles away from the fighting ; and if the poor wretches are being destroyed here or there in too great quantities, if they are ridden down by the horses

and torn to pieces by the mitrailleuses, 'Oh, clap on another thousand or two: the place must be taken at all risks.' Yes, indeed; but not much risk to you! For if you fail—if all the thousands of men have been hurled against the stone and lead only to be thrown back crushed and murdered—why, you have fought with great courage—you, the great general, sitting in your saddle miles away; it is *you* who have shown extraordinary courage!—but numbers were against you: and if you win, you have shown still greater courage; and the audacity of the movement was so and so; and your dogged persistence was so and so; and you get another star for your breast; and all the world sings your praises. And who is to court-martial a great hero for reckless waste of human life? Who is to tell him that he is a cruel-hearted coward? Who is to take him to the fields he has saturated with blood, and compel him to count the corpses; or to take him to the homesteads he has ruined throughout the land, and ask the women and sons and the daughters what they think of this marvellous courage? Oh no; he is away back in the capital—there is a triumphal procession; all we want now is another war-tax—for the peasant must pay with his money as well as with his blood—and another levy of the young men to be taken and killed!"

This was always a sore point with Natalie; and he did not seek to check her enthusiasm with any commonplace and obvious criticisms. When she got into one of these moods of proud indignation, which was not seldom, he loved her all the more. There was something in the ring of her voice that touched him to the heart. Such noble, quick, generous sympathy seemed to him far too beautiful and rare a thing to be met by argument and analysis. When he heard that pathetic tremulousness in her voice, he was ready to believe anything. When he looked at the proud lips and the moistened eyes, what cause that had won such eloquent advocacy would he not have espoused?

"Ah, well, Natalie," said he, "some day the mass of the people of the earth will be brought to see that all that can be put a stop to, if they so choose. They have the power: *Zahlen regieren die Welt*; and how can one be better employed than in spreading abroad knowledge, and showing the poorer people of the earth how the world might be governed if they would only ally themselves together? It would be more easy to persuade them if we had all of us your voice and your enthusiasm."

"Mine?" she said. "A woman's talking is not likely to

be of much use. But," she added, rather hesitatingly, "at least—she can give her sympathy—and her love—to those who are doing the real work."

"And I am going to earn yours, Natalie," said he, cheerfully, "to such a degree as you have never dreamed of, when you and I together are away in the new world. And that reminds me now you must not be frightened; but there is a little difficulty. Of course you thought of nothing, when you wrote those lines, but of doing a kindness; that was like you; your heart speaks quickly. Well—"

He himself seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"You see, Natalie, there would be no difficulty at all if you and I could get married within the next few days."

Her eyes were cast down, and she was silent.

"You don't think it possible you could get your father to consent?" he said, but without much hope.

"Oh no, I think not; I fear not," she said, in a low voice.

"Then you see, Natalie," he continued—and he spoke quite lightly, as if it was merely an affair of a moment—"there would be this little awkwardness: you are not of age; unless you get your father's consent, you cannot marry until you are twenty-one. It is not a long time—"

"I did not think of it," she said, very hurriedly, and even breathlessly. "I only thought it—it seemed hard you should go away alone—and I considered myself already your wife—and I said, 'What ought I to do?' And now—now you will tell me what to do. I do not know—I have no one to ask."

"Do you think," said he, after a pause, "that you would forget me, if you were to remain two years in England while I was in America?"

She regarded him for a moment with those large, true eyes of hers; and she did not answer in words.

"There is another way; but—it is asking too much," he said.

"What is it?" she said, calmly.

"I was thinking," he said, with some hesitation, "that if I could bribe Madame Potecki to leave her music-lessons—and take charge of you—and bring you to America—and you and she might live there until you are twenty-one—but I see it is impossible. It is too selfish. I should not have thought of it. What are two years, Natalie?"

The girl answered nothing; she was thinking deeply. When she next spoke, it was about Lord Evelyn, and of the probability of his crossing to the States, and remaining there for a year or two; and she wanted to know more about the

great country beyond the seas, and what was Philadelphia like.

Well, it was not to be expected that these two, so busy with their own affairs, were likely to notice much that was passing around them, as the forenoon sped rapidly away, and Natalie had to think of getting home again. But the little German maid servant was not so engrossed. She was letting her clear, observant blue eyes stray from the pretty young ladies riding in the Row to the people walking under the trees, and from them again to the banks of the Serpentine, where the dogs were barking at the ducks. In doing so she happened to look a little bit behind her; then suddenly she started, and said to herself, '*Herr Je!*' But the little maid had her wits about her. She pretended to have seen nothing. Gradually, however, she lessened the distance between herself and her young mistress; then, when she was quite up to her, and walking abreast with her, she said, in a low, quick voice.

"Fraulein! Fraulein!"

"What is it, Anneli?"

George Brand was listening too. He wondered that the girl seemed so excited, and yet spoke low, and kept her eyes fixed on the ground.

"Ah, do not look round, Fraulein!" said she, in the same hurried way. "Do not look round! But it is the lady who gave you the locket. She is walking by the lake. She is watching you."

Natalie did not look round. She turned to her companion, and said, without any agitation whatever,

"Do you remember, dearest? I showed you the locket, and told you about my mysterious visitor. Now Anneli says she is walking by the side of the lake. I may go and speak to her, may I not? Because it was so wicked of Calabressa to say some one had stolen the locket, and wished to restore it after many years. I never had any such locket."

She was talking quite carelessly; it was Brand himself who was most perturbed. He knew well who that stranger must be, if Anneli's sharp eyes had not deceived her.

"No, Natalie," he said, quickly, "you must not go and speak to her; and do not look round, either. Perhaps she does not wish to be seen: perhaps she would go away. Leave it to me, my darling; I will find out all about her for you."

"But it is very strange," said the girl. "I shall begin to be afraid of this emissary of Santa Claus if she continues to be so mysterious; and I do not like mystery: I think, dearest,

I must go and speak to her. She can not mean me any harm. She has brought me flowers again and again on my birthday, if it is the same. She gave me the little locket I showed you. Why may not I stop and speak to her?"

"Not now, my darling," he said, putting his hand on her arm. "Let me find out about her first."

"And how are you going to do that? In a few minutes, perhaps, she goes away; and when will you see her again? It is many months since Anneli saw her last; and Anneli sees everything and everybody."

"We will cross the bridge," said he, in a low voice, for he knew not how near the stranger might be, "and walk on to Park Lane. Anneli must tell us how far she follows. If she turns aside anywhere I will bid you good-bye and see where she goes. Do you understand, Natalie?"

She certainly did not understand why he should speak so seriously about it.

"And I am to be marched like a prisoner? I may not turn my head?"

She began to be amused. He scarcely knew what to say to her. At last he said, earnestly,

"Natalie, it is of great importance to you that I should see this lady—that I should try to see her. Do as I bid you, my dearest."

"Then you know who she is?" said Natalie, promptly.

"I have a suspicion, at all events; and—and—something may happen—that you will be glad of."

"What, more mysterious presents?" the girl said, lightly; "more messages from Santa Claus?"

He could not answer her. The consciousness that this might be indeed Natalie's mother who was so near to them; the fear of the possible consequences of any sudden disclosure; the thought that this opportunity might escape him, and he leaving in a few days for America: all these things whirled through his brain in rapid and painful succession. But there was soon to be an end of them. Natalie, still obediently following his instructions, and yet inclined to make light of the whole thing, and himself arrived at the gates of the park; Anneli, as formerly, being somewhat behind. Receiving no intimation from her, they crossed the road to the corner of Great Stanhope Street. But they had not proceeded far when Anneli said,

"Ah, Fraulein, the lady is gone! You may look after her now. See!"

That was enough for George Brand. He had no difficulty

in making out the dark figure that Anneli indicated ; and he was in no great hurry, for he feared the stranger might discover that she was being followed. But he breathed more freely when he had bidden good-bye to Natalie, and seen her set out for home.

He leisurely walked up Park Lane, keeping an eye from time to time on the figure in black, but not paying too strict attention, lest she should turn suddenly and observe him. In this way he followed her up to Oxford Street ; and there, in the more crowded thoroughfare, he lessened the distance between them considerably. He also watched more closely now, and with a strange interest. From the graceful carriage, the beautiful figure, he was almost convinced that that, indeed, was Natalie's mother ; and he began to wonder what he would say to her—how he would justify his interference.

The stranger stopped at a door next a shop in the Edgware Road ; knocked, waited, and was admitted. Then the door was shut again.

It was obviously a private lodging-house. He took a half-crown in his hand to bribe the maid-servant, and walked boldly up to the door and knocked. It was not a maid-servant who answered, however ; it was a man who looked something like an English butler, and yet there was a foreign touch about his dress—probably, Brand thought, the landlord. Brand pulled out a card-case, and pretended to have some difficulty in getting a card from it.

"The lady who came in just now—" he said, still looking at the cards.

"Madame Berezolyi ? Yes, sir."

His heart jumped. But he calmly took out a pencil, and wrote on one of the cards, in French, "*One who knows your daughter would like to see you.*"

"Will you be so kind as to take up that card to Madame Berezolyi ? I think she will see me. I will wait here till you come down."

The man returned in a couple of minutes.

"Madame Berezolyi will be pleased to see you, sir ; will you step this way ?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MOTHER.

THIS beautiful, pale, trembling mother: she stood there, dark against the light of the window; but even in the shadow how singularly like she was to Natalie, in the tall, slender, elegant figure, the proud set of the head, the calm, intellectual brows, and the large, tender, dark eyes, as soft and pathetic as those of a doe—only this woman's face was worn and sad, and her hair was silver-gray.

She was greatly agitated, and for a second or two incapable of speech. But when he began in French to apologize for his intrusion, she eagerly interrupted him.

"Ah, no, no!" she said, in the same tongue. "Do not waste words in apology. You have come to tell me about my child, my Natalie: Heaven bless you for it; it is a great kindness. To-day I saw you walking with her—listening to her voice—ah, how I envied you!—and once or twice I thought of going to her and taking her hand, and saying only one word—'Natalushka!'"

"That would have been a great imprudence," said he gravely. "If you wish to speak to your daughter—"

"If I wish to speak to her!—if I wish to speak to her!" she exclaimed; and there were tears in her voice, if there were none in the sad eyes.

"You forget, madame, that your daughter has been brought up in the belief that you died when she was a mere infant. Consider the effect of any sudden disclosure."

"But has she never suspected? I have passed her; she has seen me. I gave her a locket: what did she think?"

"She was puzzled, yes; but how would it occur to the girl that any one could be so cruel as to conceal from her all those years the fact that her mother was alive?"

"Then you yourself, monsieur—"

"I knew it from Calabressa."

"Ah, my old friend Calabressa! And he was here, in London, and he saw my Natalie. Perhaps—"

She paused for a second.

"Perhaps it was he who sent the message. I heard—it was only a word or two—that my daughter had found a lover."

She regarded him. She had the same calm fearlessness of look that dwelt in Natalie's eyes.

"You will pardon me, monsieur. Do I guess right? It is to you that my child has given her love?"

"That is my happiness," said he. "I wish I were better worthy of it."

She still regarded him very earnestly, and in silence.

"When I heard," she said, at length, in a low voice, "that my Natalie had given her love to a stranger, my heart sunk. I said, 'More than ever is she away from me now;' and I wondered what the stranger might be like, and whether he would be kind to her. Now that I see you, I am not so sad. There is something in your voice, in your look, that tells me to have confidence in you: you will be kind to Natalie."

She seemed to be thinking aloud: and yet he was not embarrassed by this confession, nor yet by her earnest look; he perceived how all her thoughts were really concentrated on her daughter.

"Her father approves?" said this sad-faced, gray-haired woman.

"Oh no; quite the contrary."

"But he is kind to her?" she said, quickly, and anxiously.

"Oh yes," he answered. "No doubt he is kind to her. Who could be otherwise?"

She had been so agitated at the beginning of this interview that she had allowed her visitor to remain standing. She now asked him to be seated, and took a chair opposite to him. Her nervousness had in a measure disappeared; though at times she clasped the fingers of both hands together, as if to force herself to be composed.

"You will tell me all about it, monsieur; that I may know what to say when I speak to my child at last. Ah, heavens, if you could understand how full my heart is: sixteen years of silence! Think what a mother has to say to her only child after that time! It was cruel—cruel—cruel!"

A little convulsive sob was the only sign of her emotion, and the fingers were clasped together.

"Pardon me, madame," said he, with some hesitation; "but, you see, I do not know the circumstances—"

"You do not know why I dared not speak to my own daughter?" she said, looking up in surprise. "Calabressa did not tell you?"

"No. There were some hints I did not understand."

"Nor of the reasons that forced me to comply with such an inhuman demand? Alas! these reasons exist no longer. I have done my duty to one whose life was sacred to me; now his death has released me from fear; I come to my

daughter now. Ah, when I fold her to my heart, what shall I say to her—what but this?—‘Natalushka, if your mother has remained away from you all these years, it was not because she did not love you.’”

He drew his chair nearer, and took her hand.

“I perceive that you have suffered, and deeply. But your daughter will make amends to you. She loves you now; you are a saint to her; your portrait is her dearest possession—”

“My portrait?” she said, looking rather bewildered. “Her father has not forbidden her that, then?”

“It was Calabressa who gave it to her quite recently.”

She gently withdrew her hand, and glanced at the table, on which two books lay, and sighed.

“The English tongue is so difficult,” she said. “And I have so much—so much—to say! I have written out many things that I wish to tell her; and have repeated them, and repeated them; but the sound is not right—the sound is not like what my heart wishes to say to her.”

“Reassure yourself, madame, on that point,” said he, cheerfully: “I should imagine there is scarcely any language in Europe that your daughter does not know something of. You will not have to speak English to her at all.”

She looked up with bright eagerness in her eyes.

“But not Magyar?”

“I do not know for certain,” he said, “for I don’t know Magyar myself; but I am almost convinced she must know it. She has told me so much about her countrymen that used to come about the house; yes, surely they would speak Magyar.”

A strange happy light came into the woman’s face; she was communing with herself—perhaps going over mentally some tender phrases, full of the soft vowel sounds of the Magyar tongue.

“That,” said she, presently, and in a low voice, “would be my crowning joy. I have thought of what I should say to her in many languages; but always ‘My daughter, I love you,’ did not have the right sound. In our own tongue it goes to the heart. I am no longer afraid: my girl will understand me.”

“I should think,” said he, “you will not have to speak much to assure her of your love.”

She seemed to become a great deal more cheerful; this matter had evidently been weighing on her mind.

“Meanwhile,” she said, “you promised to tell me all

about Natalie and yourself. Her father does not approve of your marrying. Well, his reasons?"

"If he has any, he is careful to keep them to himself," he said. "But I can guess at some of them. No doubt he would rather not have Natalie marry; it would deprive him of an excellent house-keeper. Then again—and this is the only reason he does give—he seems to consider it would be inexpedient as regards the work we are all engaged in—"

"You!" she said, with a sudden start. "Are you in the Society also?"

"Certainly, madame."

"What grade?"

He told her.

"Then you are helpless if he forbids your marriage."

"On the contrary, madame, my marriage or non-marriage has nothing whatever to do with my obedience to the Society."

"He has control over Natalie—"

"Until she is twenty-one," he answered promptly.

"But," she said, regarding him with some apprehension in her eyes, "you do not say—you do not suggest—that the child is opposed to her father—that she thinks of marrying you, when she may legally do so, against his wish?"

"My dear madame," said he, "it will be difficult for you to understand how all this affair rests until you get to know something more about Natalie herself. She is not like other girls. She has courage; she has opinions of her own: when she thinks that such and such a thing is right, she is not afraid to do it, whatever it may be. Now, she believes her father's opposition to be unjust; and—and perhaps there is something else that has influenced her: well, the fact is, I am ordered off to America, and—and the girl has a quick and generous nature, and she at once offered to share what she calls my banishment."

"To leave her father's house!" said the mother, with increasing alarm.

Brand looked at her. He could not understand this expression of anxious concern. If, as he was beginning to assure himself, Lind was the cause of that long and cruel separation between mother and daughter, why should this woman be aghast at the notion of Natalie leaving such a guardian? Or was it merely a superstitious fear of him, similar to that which seemed to possess Calabressa?

"In dealing with your daughter, madame," he continued, "one has to be careful not to take advantage of her forgetful-

ness of herself. She is too willing to sacrifice herself for others. Now to-day we were talking—as she is not free to marry until she is twenty-one—about her perhaps going over to America under the guardianship of Madame Potecki—”

“Madame Potecki.”

“She is a friend of your daughter’s—almost a mother to her; and I am not sure but that Natalie would willingly do that—more especially under your guardianship, in preference to that of Madame Potecki—”

“Oh no, no!” she exclaimed, instantly. “She must not dare her father like that. Oh, it would be terrible! I hope you will not allow her.”

“It is not a question of daring; the girl has courage enough for anything,” he said coolly. “The thing is that it would involve too great a sacrifice on her part; and I was exceedingly selfish to think of it for a moment. No; let her remain in her father’s house until she is free to act as her own mistress; then, if she will come to me, I shall take care that a proper home is provided for her. She must not be a wanderer and a stranger.”

“But even then, when she is free to act, you will not ask her to disobey her father? Oh, it will be too terrible!”

Again he regarded her with amazement.

“What do you mean, madame? What is terrible? Or is it that you are afraid of him? Calabressa spoke like that.”

“You do not know of what he is capable,” she said, with a sigh.

“All the more reason,” he said, directly, “why she should be removed from his guardianship. But permit me to say, madame, that I do not quite share your apprehensions. I have seen nothing of the bogey kind about your husband. Of course, he is a man of strong will, and he does not like to be thwarted: without that strength of character he could not have done what he has done. But he also knows that his daughter is no longer a child; and when the proper time comes you will find that his common sense will lead him to withdraw an opposition which would otherwise be futile. Do I explain myself clearly? My dear madame, have no anxiety about the future of your daughter. When you see herself, when you speak to her, you will find that she is one who is not given to fear.”

For a moment the apprehensive look left her face. She remained silent, a happier light coming into her eyes.

“She is not sad and sorrowful, then?” she said, presently.

“Oh no; she is too brave.”

"What beautiful hair she has!" said this worn-faced woman with the sad eyes. "Ah, many a time I have said to myself that when I take her to my heart I will feel the beautiful soft hair; I will stroke it; her head will lie on my bosom, and I will gather courage from her eyes: when she laughs my heart will rejoice! I have lived many years in solitude—in secret, with many apprehensions; perhaps I have grown timid and fearful; once I was not so. But I have been troubling myself with fears; I have said, 'Ah, if she looks coldly on me, if she turns away from me, then my heart will break!'"

"I do not think you have much to fear," said he, regarding the beautiful, sad face.

"I have tried to catch the sound of her voice," she continued, absently, and her eyes were filled with tears, "but I could not do that. But I have watched her, and wondered. She does not seem proud and cold."

"She will not be proud or cold to you," he said, "when she is kindness and gentleness to all the world."

"And—and when shall you see her again?" she asked, timidly.

"Now," he said. "If you will permit me, I will go to her at once. I will bring her to you."

"Oh no!" she exclaimed hastily drying her eyes. "Oh no! She must not find a sad mother, who has been crying. She will be repelled. She will think, 'I have enough of sadness.' Oh no, you must let me collect myself: I must be very brave and cheerful when my Natalie comes to me. I must make her laugh, not cry."

"Madame," said he, gravely, "I may have but a few days longer in England: do you think it is wise to put off the opportunity? You see, she must be prepared; it would be a terrible shock if she were to know suddenly. And how can one tell what may happen to-morrow or next day? At the present moment I know she is at home; I could bring her to you directly."

"Just now?" she said; and she began to tremble again. She rose and went to a mirror.

"She could not recognize herself in me. She would not believe me. And I should frighten her with my mourning and my sadness."

"I do not think you need fear, madame."

She turned to him eagerly.

"Perhaps you would explain to her? Ah, would you be so kind! Tell her I have seen much trouble of late. My father has just died, after years of illness; and we were kept

in perpetual terror. You will tell her why I dared not go to her before: oh no! not that—not that!

“You forget, madame, that I myself do not know.”

“It is better she should not know—better she should not know!” she said, rapidly. “No, let the girl have confidence in her father while she remains in his house. Perhaps some time she may know; perhaps some one who is a fairer judge than I will tell her the story and make excuses: it must be that there is some excuse.”

“She will not want to know; she will only want to come to you.”

“But half an hour, give me half an hour,” she said, and she glanced round the room. “It is so poor a chamber.”

“She will not think of the chamber.”

“And the little girl with her—she will remain down-stairs, will she not? I wish to be alone, quite alone, with my child.” Her breath came and went quickly, and she clasped her fingers tight. “Oh, monsieur, my heart will break if my child is cold to me!”

“That is the last thing you have to fear,” said he, and he rose. “Now calm yourself, madame. Recollect, you must not frighten your daughter. And it will be more than half an hour before I bring her to you; it will take more than that for me to break it to her.”

She rose also; but she was obviously so excited that she did not know well what she was doing. All her thoughts were about the forth-coming interview.

“You are sure she understands the Magyar?” she said again.

“No, I do not know. But why not speak in French to her?”

“It does not sound the same—it does not sound the same: and a mother—can only—talk to her child—”

“You must calm yourself, dear madame. Do you know that your daughter believes you to have been a miracle of courage and self-reliance? What Calabressa used to say to her was this: ‘Natalushka, when you are in trouble you will be brave; you will show yourself the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi.’”

“Yes, yes,” she said, quickly, as she again dried her eyes, and drew herself up. “I beg you to pardon me. I have thought so much of this meeting, through all these years, that my hearts beats too quickly now. But I will have no fear. She will come to me; I am not afraid: she will not turn away from me. And how am I to thank you for your great kindness?” she added, as he moved to the door.

“ By being kind to Natalie when I am away in America,” said he. “ You will not find it a difficult task.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE VELVET GLOVE.

FERDINAND LIND sat alone, after Gathorne Edwards had gone, apparently deep buried in thought. He leaned forward over his desk, his head resting on his left hand, while in his right hand he held a pencil, with which he was mechanically printing letters on a sheet of blotting-paper before him. These letters, again and again repeated, formed but one phrase : THE VELVET GLOVE. It was as if he were perpetually reminding himself, during the turnings and twistings of his sombre speculations, of the necessity of being prudent and courteous and suave. It was as if he were determined to imprint the caution on his brain—drilling it into himself—so that in no possible emergency could it be forgotten.. But as his thoughts went farther afield, he began to play with the letters, as a child might. They began to assume decorations. THE VELVET GLOVE appeared surrounded with stars ; again furnished with duplicate lines ; again breaking out into rays. At length he rose, tore up the sheet of blotting-paper, and rung a hand-bell twice.

Reitzei appeared.

“ Where will Beratinski be this evening ? ”

“ At the Culturverein : he sups there.”

“ You and he must be here at ten. There is business of importance.”

He walked across the room, and took up his hat and stick. Perhaps at this moment the caution he had been drilling into himself suggested some further word. He turned to Reitzei, who had advanced to take his place at the desk.

“ I mean if that is quite convenient to you both,” he said, courteously. “ Eleven o’clock, if you please, or twelve ? ”

“ Ten will be quite convenient,” Reitzei said.

“ The business will not take long.”

“ Then we can return to the Culturverein : it is an exhibition night : one would not like to be altogether absent.”

These sombre musings had consumed some time. When Lind went out he found it had grown dark ; the lamps were lit ; the stream of life was flowing westward. But he seemed

in no great hurry. He chose unfrequented streets ; he walked slowly ; there was less of the customary spring and jauntiness of his gait. In about half an hour he had reached the door of Madame Potecki's house.

He stood for some seconds there without ringing. Then, as some one approached, he seemed waken out of a trance. He rung sharply, and the summons was almost immediately answered.

Madame Potecki was at home, he learned, but she was dining.

"Never mind," said he, abruptly : "she will see me. Go and ask her."

A couple of minutes thereafter he was shown into a small parlor, where Madame Potecki had just risen to receive him ; and by this time a singular change had come over his manner.

"I beg your pardon—I beg a thousand pardons, my dear Madame Potecki," said he, in the kindest way, "for having interrupted you. Pray continue. I shall make sure you forgive me only if you continue. Ah, that is well. Now I will take a chair also."

Madame Potecki had again seated herself, certainly ; but she was far too much agitated by this unexpected visit to be able to go on with her repast. She was alarmed about Natalie.

"You are surprised, no doubt, at my coming to see you," said he, cheerfully and carelessly, "so soon after you were kind enough to call on me. But it is only about a trifle ; I assure you, my dear Madame Potecki, it is only about a trifle, and I must therefore insist on your not allowing your dinner to get cold."

"But if it is about Natalie—"

"My dear madame, Natalie is very well. There is nothing to alarm you. Now you will go on with your dinner, and I will go on with my talking."

Thus constrained, madame again addressed herself to the small banquet spread before her, which consisted of a couple of sausages, some pickled endive, a piece of Camembert cheese, and a tiny bottle of Erlauer. Mr. Lind turned his chair to the fire, put his feet on the fender, and lay back. He was rather smartly dressed this evening, and he was pleasant in manner.

"Natalie ought to be grateful to you, madame," said he lightly, "for your solicitude about her. It is not often one finds that in one who is not related by blood."

"I have no one now left in the world to love but herself,"

said madame ; "and then you see, my dear friend Lind, her position appeals to one : it is sad that she has no mother."

"Yes, yes," said Lind, with a trifle of impatience. "Now you were good enough to come and tell me this afternoon, madame, about that foolish little romance that Natalie has got into her head. It was kind of you ; it was well-intentioned. And after all, although that wish of hers to go to America can scarcely be serious, it is but natural that romantic ideas should get into the head of a younger girl—"

"Did not I say that to her?" exclaimed Madame Potecki, eagerly ; "and almost in these words too. And did not I say to her, 'Ah, my child, you must take care ; you must take care !'"

"That also was good advice," said Lind, courteously ; "and no doubt Natalie laid it to her heart. No, I am not afraid of her doing anything very wild or reckless. She is sensible ; she thinks ; she has not been brought up in an atmosphere of sentiment. One may say this or that on the spur of the moment, when one is excited ; but when it comes to action, one reasons, one sees what one's duty is. Natalie may have said something to you, madame, about going to America, but not with any serious intention, believe me."

"Perhaps not," said Madame Potecki, with considerable hesitation.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Lind, as he rose, and stood before the chimney-piece mirror, and arranged the ends of his gracefully tied neckerchief. "We come to another point. It was very kind of you, my dear madame, to bring me the news—to tell me something of that sort had been said ; but you know what ill-natured people will remark. You get no appreciation. They call you tale-bearer !"

Madame colored slightly.

"It is ungenerous ; it is not a fair requital of kindness ; but that is what is said," he continued. "Now, I should not like any friend of Natalie's to incur such a charge on her account, do you perceive, madame ? And, in these circumstances, do you not think that it would be better for both you and me to consider that you did not visit me this afternoon ; that I know nothing of what idle foolishness Natalie has been talking ? Would not that be better ? As for me, I am dumb."

"Oh, very well, my dear friend," said madame, quickly. "I would not for the world have Natalie or any one think that I was a mischief-maker—oh no ! And did I not promise to you that I should say nothing of my having called on you to-day ? It is already a promise."

He turned round and regarded her.

"Precisely so," he said. "You did promise ; it was kind of you ; and for myself, you may rely on my discretion. Your calling on me—what you repeated to me—all that is obliterated : you understand ?"

Madame Potecki understood that very well : but she could not quite make out why he should have come to her this evening, apparently with no object beyond that of reminding her of her promise to say nothing of her visit to Lisle Street.

He lifted his hat from an adjacent chair.

"Now I will leave you to finish your dinner in quiet. You forgive me for interrupting you, do you not ? And you will remember, I am sure, not to mention to any one about your having called on me to-day ? As for me, it is all wiped out : I know nothing. Adieu, and thanks."

He shook hands with her in a very friendly manner, and then left, saying he could open the outer door for himself.

He got home in time for dinner : he and Natalie dined together, and he was particularly kind to her ; he talked in Magyar, which was his custom when he wished to be friendly and affectionate ; he made no reference to George Brand whatsoever.

"Natalie," said he, casually, "it was not fair that you were deprived of a holiday this year. You know the reason—there were too many important things going forward. But it is not yet too late. You must think about it—think where you would like to go for two or three weeks."

She did not answer. It was on that morning that she had placed her written offer in her lover's hands ; so far there had been no reply from him.

"And Madame Potecki," her father continued ; "she is not very rich ; she has but little change. Why not take her with you instead of Anneli ?"

"I should like to take her away for a time," said the girl, in a low voice. "She lives a monotonous life ; but she has always her pupils."

"Some arrangement could be made with them, surely," her father said, lightly ; and then he added, "Paris is always the safest place to go to when one is in doubt. There you are independent of the weather ; there are so many things to see and to do if it rains. Will you think of it, Natalushka ?"

"Yes, papa," she said, though she felt rather guilty. But she was so grateful to have her father talk to her in this friendly way again, after the days of estrangement that had

passed, that she could not but pretend to fall in with his schemes.

"And I will tell you another thing," said Mr. Lind. "I intend to buy you some furs, Natalie, for the winter. These we will get in Paris."

"I am too much of an expense to you already, papa."

"You forget," said he, with mock gravity, "that you give me your invaluable services as house-keeper, and that so far you have received no salary."

There was a knock at the outer door.

"Is it nine o'clock already?" he said, in an altered tone.

"Whom do you expect, papa?"

"Gathorne Edwards."

"Then I will send you in coffee to the study."

But presently Anneli came into the room.

"Pardon, Fraulein, but the gentleman wishes to see you for one minute."

"Let him come in here, then."

Edwards came in, and shook hands with Natalie in an embarrassed manner. Then he produced a little packet.

"I have a commission, Miss Lind. It is from Signor Calabressa. He sends you this necklace, and says I am to tell you that he thinks of you always."

The message had been in reality that Calabressa "thought of her and loved her always." But Edwards was a shy person, and did not like to pronounce the word "love" to this beautiful girl, who regarded him with such proud, frank eyes.

"He has not returned with you, then?"

"No."

"But you can send him a message?"

"I will when I hear of his address."

"Then you will tell him—will you be so kind?—that the little Natalushka—that is myself," she said, smiling; "you will tell him that the little Natalushka thanks him, and is not likely to forget him."

The interview between the new visitor and Mr. Lind was speedily got over. Lind excused himself for giving Edwards the trouble of this second appointment by saying he had been much engrossed with serious business during the day. There was, indeed, little new to be communicated about the Kirski and Calabressa escapade, though Edwards repeated the details as minutely as possible. He accepted a cigar, and left.

Then Lind got his overcoat and hat and went out of the house. A hansom took him along to Lisle Street: he arrived there just as ten was striking.

There were two men at the door ; they were Beratinsky and Reitzei. All three entered and went up the narrow stair in the dark, for the old German had gone. There was some fumbling for matches on the landing ; then a light was procured, and the gas lit in the central room. Mr. Lind sat down at his desk ; the other two drew in chairs. The whole house was intently silent.

"I am sorry to take you away from your amusements," said he, civilly enough ; "but you will soon be able to return to them. The matter is of importance. Edwards has returned."

Both men nodded ; Reitzei had, in fact, informed his companion.

"As I anticipated, Calabressa's absurd proposal has been rejected, if not even scoffed at. Now, this affair must not be played with any longer. The Council has charged us, the English section, with a certain duty ; we must set about having it performed at once."

"There is a year's grace," Beratinsky observed, but Lind interrupted him curtly.

"There may be a year's grace or less allowed to the infamous priest ; there is none allowed to us. We must have our agent ready. Why, man, do you think a thing like that can be done off-hand, without long and elaborate planning ?"

Beratinsky was silenced.

"Are we to have the Council think that we are playing with them ? And that was not the only thing in connection with the Calabressa scheme which you, Reitzei, were the first to advocate. Every additional person whom you let into the secret is a possible weak point in the carrying out of the design ; do you perceive that ? And you had to let this man Edwards into it."

"But he is safe."

Lind laughed.

"Safe ? Yes ; because he knows his own life would not be worth a half-franc piece if he betrayed a Council secret. However, that is over : no more about it. We must show the Council that we can act and promptly."

There was silence for a second or two.

"I have no need to wait for the further instructions of the Council," Lind resumed. "I know what they intend. They intend to make it clear to all Europe that this is not a Camorra act of vengeance. The Starving Cardinal has thousands of enemies ; the people curse and groan at him ; if he were stabbed by an Italian, 'Oh, another of those Camorristi wretches !' would be the cry. The agent must come from

England, and, if he is taken red-handed, then let him say if he likes that he is connected with an association which knows how to reach evil-doers who are beyond the ordinary reach of the law; but let him make it clear that it is no Camorra affair: you understand?"

"Yes, yes," said both men.

"Now you know what the Council have ordained," continued Lind, calmly, "that no agent shall be appointed to undertake any service involving immediate peril to life without a ballot among at least four persons. It was absurd of Calabressa to imagine that they would abrogate their own decree, merely because that Russian madman was ready for anything. Well, it is not expedient that this secret should be confided to many. It is known to four persons in this country. We are three of the four."

The two men started.

"Yes," he said boldly, and he regarded each of them in turn. "That is my proposal: that we ourselves form three of the ballot of four. The fourth must be an Englishman."

"Edwards?" said Beratinsky. Reitzei was thinking too much of his own position to speak.

"No," said Lind, calmly playing with his pencil, "Edwards is a man of books, not of action. I have been thinking that the fourth ought to be—George Brand."

He watched them both. Reitzei was still preoccupied; but the small black eyes of Beratinsky twinkled eagerly.

"Yes, yes, yes! Very good! There we have our four. For myself, I am not afraid; not I!"

"And you, Reitzei; are you satisfied?" said Lind merely as a matter of form.

The younger man started.

"Oh yes, the Council must be obeyed," said he, absently.

"Gentlemen," said Lind, rising, "the business is concluded. Now you may return to your Culturverein."

But when the others had risen, he said, in a laughing way, "There is only one thing I will add: you may think about it at your leisure. The chances are three to one, and we all run the same risk; but I confess I should not be sorry to see the Englishman chosen; for, you perceive, that would make the matter clear enough. They would not accuse an Englishman of complicity with the Camorra—would they, Reitzei? If the lot fell to the Englishman, I should not be disappointed—would you, Beratinsky?"

Beratinsky, who was about to leave, turned sharply and the coal-black eyes were fixed intently on Lind's face.

"I?" he said. "Not I! We will talk again about it, Brother Lind."

Reitzei opened the door, Lind screwed out the gas, and then the three men descended the wooden staircase, their footsteps sounding through the silent house.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SANTA CLAUS.

To save time Brand jumped into a hansom and drove down to Curzon Street. He was too much preoccupied to remember that Natalie had wished him not to come to the house. Anneli admitted him, and showed him up-stairs into the drawing-room. In a couple of seconds or so Natalie herself appeared.

"Well," said she lightly, "you have come to tell me about Santa Claus? You have discovered the mysterious messenger?"

She shut the door and went forward to him.

"What is the matter?" she said, quickly: there was something in his look that alarmed her.

He caught both her hands in his, and held them tight.

"Nothing to frighten you, at all events," said he: "no, Natalie I have good news for you. Only—only—you must be brave.

It was he who was afraid; he did not know how to begin.

"That locket there," said he, regarding the little silver trinket. "Have you ever thought about it?—why do you wear it?"

"Why do I wear it?" she said, simply. "Because one day that Calabressa was talking to me it occurred to me that the locket might have belonged to my mother, and that some one had wished to give it to me. He did not say it was impossible. It was his talk of Natalie and Natalushka that put it in my head; perhaps it was a stupid fancy."

"Natalie, the locket did belong to your mother."

"Ah, you know, then?" she said, quickly, but with nothing beyond a bright and eager interest. "You have seen that lady? Well, what does she say?—was she angry that you followed her? Did you thank her for me for all those presents of flowers?"

"Natalie," said he almost in despair, "have you never

thought about it—about the locket? Have you never thought of what might be possible?”

“I do not understand you,” she said, with a bewildered air. “What is it? why do you not speak?”

“Because I am afraid. See, I hold your hands tight because I am afraid. And yet it is good news: your heart will be filled with joy; your life will be quite different from to-day ever after. Natalie, cannot you imagine for yourself—something beautiful happening to you—something you may have dreamed of—”

She became a little pale, but she maintained her calmness.

“Dearest,” said she, “why are you afraid to tell me. You hold my hands: do they tremble?”

“But, Natalie, think!” he said. “Think of the locket; it was given you by one who loved you—who has loved you all these years—and been kept away from you—and now she is waiting for you.”

He studied her face intently: there was nothing there but a vague bewilderment. He grew more and more to fear the effect of the shock.

“Yes, yes. Can you not think, now, if it were possible that one whom you have always thought to be dead—whom you have loved all through your life—if it were she herself—”

She withdrew her hands from his, and caught the back of a chair. She was ghastly pale; for a second she did not speak.

“You will kill me—if it is not true,” she said, in a low voice, and still staring at him with frightened, bewildered eyes.

“Natalie, it is true,” said he, stepping forward to catch her by the arm, for he thought she was going to fall.

She sunk into a chair, and covered her face with her hands—not to cry, but to think. She had to reverse the belief of a lifetime in a second.

But suddenly she started up, her face still white, her lips firm.

“Take me to her; I must see her; I will go at once.”

“You shall not,” he said, promptly; but he himself was beginning to breathe more freely. “I will not allow you to see her until you are perfectly calm.”

He put his hand on her arm gently.

“Natalie,” said he, “you must calm yourself—for her sake. She has been suffering; she is weak; any wild scene would do her harm. You must calm yourself, my darling;

you must be the braver of the two ; you must show yourself very strong—for her sake."

"I am quite calm," she said, with pale lips. She put her left hand over her heart. "It is only my heart that beats so."

"Well, in a little while—"

"Now—now !" she pleaded, almost wildly. "I must see her. When I try to think of it, it is like to drive me mad ; I cannot think at all. Let us go !"

"You must think," he said firmly ; "you must think of what you are going to say ; and your dress, too. Natalie, you must take that piece of scarlet ribbon away ; one who is nearly related to you has just died."

She tore it off instantly.

"And you know Magyar, don't you, Natalie ?"

"Oh yes, yes."

"Because your mother has been learning English in order to be able to speak to you."

Again she placed her hand over her heart, and there was a look of pain on her face.

"My dearest, let us go ! I can bear no more : my heart will break ! See, am I not calm enough ? Do I tremble ?"

"No, you are very courageous," he said, looking at her doubtfully.

"Let us go !—let us go !"

Her entreaties overcame his scruples. The things she had thrown aside on coming in from her morning walk still lay there ; she hastily put them on ; and she herself led the way downstairs. He put her into the hansom, and followed ; the man drove off. She held her lover's hand tight, as a sign of her gratitude.

"Mind, I depend on you, Natalie," he said.

"Oh, do not fear," she said, rather wildly ; "why should one fear ? It seems to me all a strange sort of dream ; and I shall waken out of it by-and-by, and go back to the house. Why should I be surprised to see her, when she is my constant companion ? And do you think I shall not know what to say ?—I have talked to her all my life."

But when they had reached the house, and were admitted, this half-hysterical courage had fled.

"One moment, dearest ; give me one moment," she said, at the foot of the stairs, as if her breath failed her, and she put her hand on his arm.

"Now, Natalie," he whispered, "you must think of your

mother as an invalid—not to be excited, you understand ; there is to be no scene.”

“ Yes, yes,” she said, but she scarcely heard him.

“ Now go,” he said, “ and I will wait here.”

“ No, I wish you to come,” she said.

“ You ought to be alone with her.”

“ I wish you to come,” she repeated ; and she took his hand.

They went up-stairs ; the door was wide open ; a figure stood in the middle of the room. Natalie entered first ; she was very white, that was all. It was the other woman who was trembling—trembling with anxious fears, and forgetful of every one of the English phrases she had learned.

The girl at the door hesitated but for a moment. Breathless, wondering, she beheld this vision—worn as the face was, she recognized in it the features she had learned to love ; and there were the dark and tender eyes she had so often held commune with when she was alone. It was only because she was so startled that she thus hesitated ; the next instant she was in her mother’s arms held tight there, her head against her bosom.

Then the mother began, in her despair,

“ My—my daughter—you—do—know me ? ”

But the girl, not looking up, murmured some few words in a language Brand did not understand ; and at the sound of them the mother uttered a wild cry of joy, and drew her daughter closer to her, and laid her streaming, worn, sad face on the beautiful hair. They spoke together in that tongue ; the sounds were soft and tender to the ear ; perhaps it was the yearning of love that made them so.

Then Natalie remembered her promise. She gently released herself ; she led her mother to a sofa, and made her sit down ; she threw herself on her knees beside her, and kissed her hand ; then she buried her head in her mother’s lap. She sobbed once or twice ; she was determined not to give way to tears. And the mother stroked the soft hair of the girl, which she could hardly see, for her eyes were full ; and from time to time she spoke to her in those gentle, trembling tones, bending over her and speaking close to her ear. The girl was silent ; perhaps afraid to awake from a dream.

“ Natalie,” said George Brand.

She sprung to her feet.

“ Oh, I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon ! ” she said, hurriedly. “ I had forgotten—”

"No, you have not forgotten," he said, with a smile. "You have remembered; you have behaved well. Now that I have seen you through it, I am going; you ought to be by yourselves."

"Oh no!" she said, in a bewildered way. "Without you I am useless: I cannot think. I should go on talking and talking to my mother all day, all night—because—because my heart is full. But—but one must do something. Why is she here? She will come home with me—now!"

"Natalie," said he, gravely, "you must not even mention such a thing to her: it would pain her. Can you not see that there are sufficient reasons why she should not go, when she has not been under your father's roof for sixteen years?"

"And why has my father never told me?" the girl said, breathlessly.

"I cannot say."

She thought for a moment; but she was too excited to follow out any train of thinking.

"Ah," she said, "what matter? I have found a great treasure. And you, you shall not go: it will be we three together now. Come!"

She took his hand; she turned to her mother; her face flushed with shyness. She said something, her eyes turned to the ground, in that soft musical language he did not understand.

"I know, my child," the mother answered in French, and she laughed lightly despite her wet eyes. "Do you think one cannot see?—and I have been following you like a spy!"

"Ah, then," said the girl, in the same tongue, "do you see what lies they tell? They say when the mother comes near her child, the heart of the child knows and recognizes her. It is not true! it is not true!—or perhaps one has a colder heart than the others. You have been near to me, mother; I have watched, as you went away crying, and all I said was, 'Ah, the poor lady, I am sorry for her!' I had no more pity for you than Anneli had. Anneli used to say, 'Perhaps, fraulein, she has lost some one who resembles you.'"

"I had lost you—I had lost you," the mother said, drawing the girl toward her again. "But now I have found you again, Natalushka. I thank God for his goodness to me. I said to myself, 'If my child turns away from me, I will die!' and I thought that if you had any portrait of me, it would be taken when I was young, and you would not care for an old woman grown haggard and plain—"

"Oh, do you think it is for smooth portraits that I care?"

the girl said, impetuously. She drew out from some concealed pocket a small case, and opened it. "Do you think it is for smooth faces one cares? There—I will never look at it again!"

She threw it on to the table with a proud gesture.

"But you had it next your heart, Natalushka," said her mother, smiling.

"But I have you in my heart, mother: what do I want with a portrait?" said the girl.

She drew her daughter down to her again, and put her arm once more round her neck.

"I once had hair like yours, Natalushka, but not so beautiful as yours, I think. And you wore the locket, too? Did not that make you guess? Had you no suspicion?"

"How could I—how could I?" she asked. "Even when I showed it to Calabressa—"

Here she stopped suddenly.

"Did he know, mother?"

"Oh yes."

"Then why did he not tell me? Oh, it was cruel!" she said, indignantly.

"He told me, Natalie," George Brand said.

"You knew?" the girl said, turning to him with wide eyes.

"Yes; and Calabressa, when he told me, implored me never to tell you. Well, perhaps he thought it would give you needless pain. But I was thinking, within the last few days, that I ought to tell you before I left for America."

"Do you hear, mother?" the girl said, in a low voice. "He is going away to America—and alone. I wished to go; he refuses."

"Now I am going away much more contented, Natalie, since you will have a constant companion with you. I presume, madame, you will remain in England?"

The elder woman looked up with rather a frightened air.

"Alas, monsieur, I do not know! When at last I found myself free—when I knew I could come and speak to my child—that was all I thought of."

"But you wish to remain in England: is it not so?"

"What have I in the world now but this beautiful child—whose heart is not cold, though her mother comes so late to claim her?"

"Then be satisfied, madame. It is simple. No one can interfere with you. But I will provide you, if you will allow me, with better lodgings than these. I have a few days' idleness still before me."

"That is his way, mother," Natalie said, in a still lower voice. "It is always about others he is thinking—how to do one a kindness."

"I presume," he said, in quite a matter-of-fact way, "that you do not wish your being in London to become known?"

She looked up timidly, but in truth she could hardly take her attention away from this newly-found daughter of hers for a single second. She still continued stroking the soft hair and rounded cheek as she said,

"If that is possible."

"It would not be long possible in an open thoroughfare like this," he said; "But I think I could find you a small old-fashioned house down about Brompton, with a garden and a high wall. I have passed such places occasionally. There Natalie could come to see you, and walk with you. There is another thing," he said, in a matter-of-fact way, taking out his watch. "It is now nearly two o'clock. Now, dear madame, Natalie is in the habit of having luncheon at one. You would not like to see your child starve before your eyes?"

The elder woman rose instantly; then she colored somewhat.

"No doubt you did not expect visitors," George Brand said, quickly. "Well, what do you say to this? Let us get into a four-wheeled cab, and drive down to my chambers. I have an indefatigable fellow, who could get something for us in the desert of Saharra."

"What do you say, child?"

Natalie had risen too: she was regarding her mother with earnest eyes, and not thinking much about luncheon.

"I will do whatever you wish," she was saying: but suddenly she cried, "Oh, I am indeed so happy!" and flung her arms round her mother's neck, and burst into a flood of tears for the first time. She had struggled long; but she had broken down at last.

"Natalie," said George Brand, pretending to be very anxious about the time, "could you get your mother's things for her? I think we shall be down there by a quarter past two."

She turned to him with her streaming eyes.

"Yes, we will go with you, Do not let us be separated."

"Then look sharp," said he, severely.

Natalie took her mother into the adjoining room. Brand, standing at the window, succeeded in catching the eye of a cab-man, whom he signaled to come to the door below. Presently the two women appeared.

"Now," he said, "Miss Natalie, there is to be no more crying."

"Oh no!" she said, smiling quite radiantly. "And I am so anxious to see the rooms—I have heard so much of them from Lord Evelyn."

She said nothing further then, for she was passing before him on her way out. In doing so, she managed, unseen, to pick up the miniature she had thrown on the table. She had made believe to despise that portrait very much; but all the same, as they went down the dark staircase, she conveyed it back to the secret little pocket she had made for it—next her heart.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A SUMMONS.

"MOTHER," said the girl, in the soft-sounding Magyar, as these two were together going down-stairs, "give me your hand; let me hold it tight, to make sure. All the way here I kept terrifying myself by thinking it must be a dream; that I should wake, and find the world empty without you, just as before. But now—now with your hand in mine, I am sure."

"Natalushka, you can hear me speak also. Ghosts do not speak like this, do they?"

Brand had preceded them to open the door. As Natalie was passing him she paused for a second, and regarded him with the beautiful, tender, dark eyes.

"I am not likely to forget what I owe to you," she said in English.

He followed them into the cab.

"What you owe to me?" he said, lightly. "You owe me nothing at all. But if you wish to do me a good turn, you may pretend to be pleased with whatever old Waters can get together for you. The poor old fellow will be in a dreadful state. To entertain two ladies, and not a moment of warning! However, we will show you the river, and the boats and things, and give him a few minutes' grace."

Indeed, it was entirely as a sort of harmless frolic that he chose to regard this present excursion of theirs. He was afraid of the effect of excessive emotion on this worn woman, and he was anxious that she should see her daughter cheerful and happy. He would not have them think of any future;

above all, he would have nothing said about himself or America ; it was all an affair of the moment—the joyous re-union of mother and daughter—a pleasant morning with London all busy and astir—the only serious thing in the whole world the possible anxieties and struggles of the venerable major-domo in Buckingham Street.

He had not much difficulty in entertaining these two guests of his on their way down. They professed to be greatly interested in the history and antiquities of the old-fashioned little thoroughfare over the river ; arrived there, they regarded with much apparent curiosity the houses pointed out to them as having been the abode of illustrious personages : they examined the old water gate ; and, in ascending the oak staircase, they heard of painted ceilings and what not with a deep and respectful attention. But always these two had each other's hand clasped tight, and occasionally Natalie murmured a little snatch of Magyar. It was only to make sure, she explained.

Before they reached the topmost story they heard a considerable noise overhead. It was a one-sided altercation ; broken and piteous on the one hand, voluble and angry on the other.

“ It sounds as if Waters were having a row with the man in possession,” Brand said.

They drew nearer.

“ Why, Natalie, it is your friend Kirski ! ”

Brand was following his two guests up-stairs ; and so could not interfere between the two combatants before they arrived. But the moment that Natalie appeared on the landing there was a dead silence. Kirski shrunk back with a slight exclamation, and stood looking from one to the other with a frightened air. She advanced to him and asked him what was the matter, in his native tongue. He shrunk farther back. The man could not or would not speak. He murmured something to himself, and stared at her as if she were a spectre.

“ He has got a letter for you, sir,” Waters said ; “ I have seen the address ; and he will neither leave it nor take it. And as for what he has been trying to say, Lord A'mighty knows what it is—I don't.”

“ Very well—all right,” Brand said. “ You leave him to us. Cut away and get some luncheon—whatever you can find—at once.”

But Natalie had gone nearer to the Russian, and was talking to him in that fearless, gentle way of hers. By-and-by he spoke, in an uncertain, almost gasping voice. Then he

showed her a letter ; and, in obedience to something she said, went timidly forward and placed it in Brand's hand.

*" A Monsieur,
M. George Brand, Esq.,
Londres."*

This was the superscription ; and Brand recognized the handwriting easily enough.

"The letter is from Calabressa," he said obviously. "Tell him not to be alarmed. We shall not eat him, however hungry we may be."

Kirski had recovered himself somewhat, and was speaking eagerly to her, in a timid, anxious, imploring fashion. She listened in silence ; but she was clearly somewhat embarrassed, and when she turned to her lover there was some flush of color on her face.

"He talks some wild things," she said, "and some foolish things ; but he means no harm. I am sorry for the poor man. He is afraid you are angry with him ; he says he promised never to try to see me ; that he would not have come if he had known. I have told him you are not angry ; that it is not his fault ; that you will show that you are not angry."

But first of all Brand ushered his guests into the long, low-roofed chamber, and drew the portieres across the middle, so that Waters might have an apartment for his luncheon preparations. Then he opened the letter. Kirski remained at the door, with his cap in his hand.

"MY MUCH-ESTEEMED FRIEND,"—Calabressa wrote, in his ornate, ungrammatical, and phonetic French—"the poor devil who is the bearer of this letter is known to you, and yet not altogether known to you. You know something of his conversion from a wild beast into a man—from the tiger into a devotee ; but you do not, my friend, perhaps entirely know how his life has become absorbed in one worship, one aspiration, one desire. The means of the conversion, the instrument, you know, have I not myself before described it to you ? The harassed and bleeding heart, crushed with scorn and filled with despair—how can a man live with that in his bosom ? He wishes to die. The world has been too cruel to him. But all at once an angel appears ; into the ruins of the wasted life a seed of kindness is dropped, and then behold the beautiful flower of love springing up—love that be-

comes a worship, a religion! Yes, I have said so much before to you; now I say more; now I entreat you not to check this beautiful worship—it is sacred. This man goes round the churches; he stands before the pictures of the saints; he wanders on unsatisfied: he says there is no saint like the beautiful one in England, who healed him with her soft words when he was sick to death. But now, my dear Monsieur Brand, I hear you say to yourself, ‘What is my friend Calabressa after now? Has he taken to the writings of pious sermons? Is he about to shave his head and put a rope round his waist? My faith, that is not like that fellow Calabressa!’ You are right, my friend. I describe the creation of the devotee; it is a piece of poetry, as one might say. But your devotee must have his amulet; is it not so? This is the meaning and prayer of my letter to you. The bearer of it was willing to do us a great service; perhaps—if one must confess it—he believed it was on behalf of the beautiful Natalushka and her father that he was to undertake the duty that now devolves on some other. One must practice a little *finesse* sometimes; what harm is there? Very well. Do you know what he seeks by way of reward—what he considers the most valuable thing in the world? It is a portrait of his saint, you understand? That is the amulet the devotee would have. And I do not further wish to write to her; no, because she would say, ‘What, that is a little matter to do for my friend Calabressa.’ No; I write to you—I write to one who has knowledge of affairs—and I say to myself, ‘If he considers it prudent, then he will ask the beautiful child to give her portrait to this one who will worship it.’ I have declared to him that I will make the request; I make it. Do not consider it a trifling matter; it is not to him; it is the crown of his existence. And if he says, ‘Do you see, this is what I am ready to do for her—I will give my life if she or her friends wish it;’ then I say—I, Calabressa—that a portrait at one shilling, two shillings, ten shillings, is not so very much in return. Now, my dear friend, you will consider the prudence of granting his request and mine. I believe in his faithfulness. If you say to him, ‘The beautiful lady who was kind to you wishes you to do this or do that; or wishes you never to part with this portrait; or wishes you to keep silence on this or on that,’ you may depend on him. I say so. Adieu! Say to the little one that there is some one who does not forget her. Perhaps you will never hear from Calabressa again: remember him not as a

madcap, but as one who wishes you well. To-morrow I start for Cyprus—then farther—with a light heart. Adieu!

“CALABRESSA.”

He handed the letter to Natalie's mother. The elder woman read the letter carefully. She laughed quietly; but there were tears in her eyes.

“It is like my old friend Calabressa,” she said. “Natalushka, they want you to give your portrait to this poor creature who adores you. Why not? Calabressa says he will do whatever you tell him. Tell him, then, not to part with it; not to show it to any one, and not to say to any one he has seen either you or me here. Is not that simple? Tell him to come here to-morrow or next day; you can send the photograph to Mr. Brand.”

The girl went to the door, and said a few words to Kirski. He said nothing in reply, but sunk on his knees, as he had done in Curzon Street, and took her hand and kissed it; then he rose, and bowed respectfully to the others, and left.

Presently Waters came in and announced that luncheon was on the table; the portieres were drawn aside; they passed into the farther end of the apartment, and sat down. The banquet was not a sumptuous one, and there were no flowers on the table; but it was everything that any human being could have done in fifteen minutes; and these were bachelors' rooms. Natalie took care to make a pretty speech in the hearing of Mr. Waters.

“Yes, but you eat nothing,” the host said. “Do you think your mother will have anything if she sees you indifferent?”

Presently the mother, who seemed to be much amused with something or other, said in French,

“Ah, my friend, I did not think my child would be so deceitful. I did not think she would deceive you.”

The girl stared with wide eyes.

“She pretended to tell you what this poor man said to her,” said the mother, with a quiet smile. “She forgot that some one else than herself might know Russian.”

Natalie flushed red.

“Mother!” she remonstrated. “I said he had spoken a lot of foolish things.”

“After all,” said the mother, “he said no more than what Calabressa says in the letter. You have been kind to him; he regards you as an angel; he will give you his life; you, or any one whom you love. The poor man! Did you see how he trembled?”

Natalie turned to George Brand.

"He said something more than that," said she. "He said he had undertaken some duty, some service, that was expected to have cost him his life. He did not know what it was : do you ?"

"I do not," said he, answering frankly the honest look of her eyes. "I can scarcely believe any one was foolish enough to think of intrusting any serious duty to a man like that. But still Calabressa hints as much ; and I know he left England with Calabressa."

"Natalushka," the mother said, cautiously, and yet with an anxious scrutiny, "I have often wondered—whether you knew much—much about the Society."

"Oh no, mother ! I am allowed to translate, and sometimes I hear that help is to be given here or there ; but I am in no secrets at all. That is my misfortune."

The mother seemed much relieved.

"It is not a misfortune, child. You are happier as you are, I think. Then," she added, with a quick glance, "you have never heard of one—Bartolotti ?"

"No," she answered ; but directly afterwards she exclaimed, "Oh yes, yes ! Bartolotti, that is the name Calabressa gave me. He said if ever I was in very serious trouble, I was to go to Naples ; and that was the password. But I thought to myself, 'If I am in trouble, why should I not go to my own father ?' "

The mother rose and went to the girl, and put her arm round her daughter's neck, and stooped down.

"Natalushka," said she, earnestly, "you are wiser than Calabressa. If you are in trouble, do not seek any help that way. Go to your father."

"And to you, mother," said she, drawing down the worn, beautiful face and kissing it. "Why not to you also ? Why not to you both ?"

The mother smiled, and patted the girl's head, and then returned to the other side of the table. Waters brought in some fruit, fresh from Covent Garden.

He also brought in a letter, which he put beside his master's plate. Brand did not even look at it ; he pushed it aside, to give him more room. But in pushing it aside he turned it somewhat and Natalie's eye happening to fall on the address, she perceived at once that it was in the handwriting of her father.

"Dearest," said she, in a low voice, and rather breathlessly, "the letter is from papa."

"From your father ?" said he, without any great concern.

Then he turned to Natalie's mother. "Will you excuse me? My friends are determined to remind me of their existence to-day."

But this letter was much shorter than Calabressa's, though it was friendly enough.

"MY DEAR MR. BRAND," it ran,—“I am glad to hear that you acted with so much promptitude that your preparations for departure are nearly complete. You are soldier-like. I have less scruples, therefore, in asking you to be so kind as to give me up to-morrow evening from half-past nine onward, for the consideration of a very serious order that has been transmitted to us from the Council. You will perceive that this claims precedence over any of our local arrangements; and as it may even involve the abandonment of your voyage to America, it will be advisable to give it immediate consideration. I trust the hour of half-past nine will not interfere with any engagement.

“Your colleague and friend, FERDINAND LIND.”

This was all that an ordinary reader would have seen in the letter; but Brand observed also, down at the left-hand corner, a small mark in green color. That tiny arrow, with the two dots—the whole almost invisible—changed the letter from an invitation into a command. It signified “On business of the Council.”

He laid down the letter, and said lightly to Natalie,

“Now I have some news for you. I may not have to go to America after all.”

“You are not going to America?” she said, in a bewildered way. “Oh, if it were possible—if it were possible!” she murmured, “I would say I was too happy. God is too good to me—to have them both given back to me in one day—both of them in one day—”

“Natalie,” said he, gently, “it is only a possibility, you know.”

“But it is possible!” she said; and there was a quick, strange, happy light in her face. “It *is* possible, is it not?”

Then she glanced at her mother; and her face, that had been somewhat pale, was pale no longer; the blood mounted to her forehead; her eyes were downcast.

“It would please you, would it not?” she said, somewhat formally, and in a low and timid voice. The mother, unobserved, smiled.

“Oh yes,” he said, cheerfully. “But even if I go to America,

expect your mother and you to be arriving at Sandy Hook ; and what then ? In a couple of years—it is not a long time—I should I should have a small steamer there to meet you, and we could sail up the bay together.”

Luncheon over, they went to the window, and greatly admired the view of the gardens below and the wide river beyond ; and they went round the room examining the water-colors, and bits of embroidery, and knickknacks brought from many lands, and they were much interested in one or two portraits. Altogether they were charmed with the place, though the elder lady said, in her pretty, careful French, that it was clear no woman’s hand was about, otherwise there would have been white curtains at the windows besides those heavy straight folds of red. Brand said he preferred to have plenty of light in the room ; and, in fact, at this moment the sunlight was painting squares of beautiful color on the faded old Turkey-carpet. All this time Natalie had shown much reserve.

When the mother and daughter were in the cab together going to Edgware Road—George Brand was off by himself to Brompton—the mother said,

“ Natalushka, why was your manner so changed to Mr. Brand, after you heard he might not be going to America ? ”

The girl hesitated for a moment, and her eyes were lowered.

“ You see, mother,” she said, with some embarrassment, “ when one is in great trouble and difficulty—and when you wish to show sympathy—then, perhaps, you speak too plainly. You do not think of choosing very prudent words ; your heart speaks for you ; and one may say things that a girl should not be too ready to confess. That is when there is great trouble, and you are grieved for some one. But—but—when the trouble goes away—when it is all likely to come right—one remembers—”

The explanation was rather stammering and confused.

“ But at least, mother,” she added, with her eyes still downcast, “ at least I can be frank with you. There is no harm in my telling you that I love you.”

The mother pressed the hand that she held in hers.

“ And if you tell me often enough, Natalushka, perhaps I shall begin to believe you.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A NEW HOME.

GEORGE BRAND set out house-hunting with two exceptional circumstances in his favor: he knew precisely what he wanted, and he was prepared to pay for it. Moreover, he undertook the task willingly and cheerfully. It was something to do. It would fill in a portion of that period of suspense. It would prevent his harassing himself with speculations as to his own future—speculations which were obviously useless until he should learn what was required of him by the Council.

But none the less was he doomed to the house-hunter's inevitable disappointment. He found, in the course of his devious wanderings through all sorts of out-of-the way thoroughfares within a certain radius from Brompton Church, that the houses which came nearest to his ideal cottage in a walled garden were either too far away from Hyde Park, or they were not to be let, or they were to be let unfurnished. So, like a prudent person, he moderated his desires, and began to cast about for any furnished house of fairly cheerful aspect, with a garden behind. But here again he found that the large furnished houses were out of the question, because they were unnecessarily expensive, and that the smaller ones were mostly to be found in slummy streets; while in both cases there was a difficulty about servants. The end of it was that he took the first floor of an old-fashioned house in Hans Place, being induced to do so partly because the landlady was a bright, pleasant-looking little Frenchwoman, and partly because the rooms were furnished and decorated in a fashion not common to lodging-houses.

Then came the question of terms, references, and what not; and on all of these points Mr. Brand showed himself remarkably complaisant. But when all this was done he sat down, and said,

"Now I wish you to understand me clearly, madame. This lady I have told you about has come through much trouble; you are to be kind to her, and I will see you do not lose by it. Her daughter will come to see her frequently, perhaps every day; I suppose the young lady's maid can remain down-stairs somewhere."

"Oh yes, sir."

"Very well. Now if you will be so good as to get me pen

and ink I will give you a check for fifty-two pounds—that is, a pound a week for a year. You see, there are a number of little kindnesses you could show this poor lady that would be all the more appreciated if they were not put down in a book and charged for: you understand? You could find out, perhaps, from time to time some little delicacy she is fond of. Then flowers: there is a good florist's shop in Sloane Street, is there not?"

"Oh yes, sir."

She brought the ink, and he drew out the check.

"Then when the young lady comes to see her mother you will be very attentive and kind to her too. You must not wait for them to ask for this or that; you must come up to the door and say 'Will not the young lady have a cup of chocolate?' or whatever you can suggest—fruit, biscuits, wine, or what not. And as these little extras will cost you something, I cannot allow you to be out of pocket; so here is a fund for you to draw from; and, of course, not a word to either of the ladies. I think you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir," said madame.

"Then, if I hear that you have been very kind and obliging, I suppose one might be allowed from time to time to send you a little present—something to beautify your house with? You have pretty rooms; you have shown great taste in decorating them."

"Oh, not I, sir," said the little Frenchwoman; "I took the house as it stands from Mr. ———."

"The architect," said Brand. "Ah, that explains. But I am surprised he should have used gas."

"That *was* my doing," said the landlady, with some pride. "It is a great improvement. It is so convenient, is it not?"

"My dear madame," said Brand, seriously, "it cannot be convenient to have one's lungs poisoned with the smoke of London gas. You must on no account allow this lady who is coming to your house to sit through the long evenings with gas blazing over her head all the time; why, she would have continual headache. No, no, you must get a couple of lamps—one for the piano there, and a smaller reading-one for this little table by the fire. Then these sconces, you will get candles for them, of course; red ones look pretty—not pink, but red."

The French landlady seemed rather dismayed. She had been all smiles and courtesy so far; but now the bargain did not promise to be so profitable if this was the way she was to begin. But Brand pulled out his watch.

"If you will allow me," said he, "I will go and get a few things to make the room look homely. You see this lady must be made as comfortable as possible, for she will see no one but her daughter, and all the evenings she will be alone. Now will you be so good as to have the fire lit? And these little things I am about to get for you, of course they will become your property; only you need not say who presented them to you, you perceive?"

The little woman's face grew happy again, and she assured him fervently and repeatedly that he might trust her to do her best for this lady about whom he seemed so anxious.

It was almost dusk when he went out; most of the shops in Sloane Street had their windows lit. He set about this further task of his with an eager delight. For although it was ostensibly for Natalie's mother that he was buying this and buying that, there was an underlying consciousness that Natalie herself would be pleased—that many and many a time she would occupy that pretty little sitting-room, that perhaps she might guess who it was who had been so thoughtful about her mother and herself. Fortunately Sloane Street is an excellent shopping thoroughfare; he got everything he wanted—even wax candles of the proper tint of red. He first of all went to the florist's and got fruit and flowers enough to decorate a hall. Then from shop to shop he wandered, buying books here, a couple of lamps there, a low, softly-cushioned easy-chair, a fire-screen, pastils, tins of sweet biscuits, a dozen or two of Hungarian wine, a tea-making apparatus, a box of various games, some white rose scent, and he was very near adding a sewing-machine, but thought he would wait to see whether she understood the use of that instrument. All these and many other articles were purchased on the explicit condition that they were to be delivered in Hans Place within the following half-hour.

Then he went back to the lodging-house, carrying in his hand the red candles. These he placed himself in the sconces, and lit them; the effect was good, now that the fire was blazing cheerfully. One by one the things arrived; and gradually the lodging-house sitting-room grew more and more like a home. He put the flowers here and there about the place, the little Frenchwoman having brought him such small jars and vases as were in her possession—these fortunately including a couple of bits of modern Venetian glass. The reading-lamp was lit and put on the small table; the newly imported easy-chair was drawn to the fire; some books and the evening papers scattered about. He lit one of the

pastils, put the fire-screen in its place, and had a last look round.

Then he got into a hansom and drove up to the house in the Edgware Road. He was immediately admitted and shown up-stairs. Natalie's mother rose to receive him; he fancied she had been crying.

"I am come to take you to your new rooms," he said, cheerfully. "They are better than these."

"Ah, that is kind of you," she said, also speaking in French; "but in truth what do I care where I am? My heart is full of joy. It is enough for me to sit quiet and say to myself, 'My child loves me. She has not turned away from me. She is more beautiful even than I had believed; and she has a good heart. I have no longer any fear.'"

"Yes, madame," said he, "but you must not sit quiet and think like that, or you will become ill, and then how are you to go out walking with Natalie? You have many things to do, and many things to decide on. For example, you will have to explain to her how it is you may not go to her father's house. At this moment what other thing than that do you imagine she is thinking about? She will ask you."

"I would rather not tell her," said the mother, absently; "it is better she should not know."

He hesitated for a second or two.

"Then it is impossible that a reconciliation between your husband and yourself—"

"Oh no, no!" she said, somewhat sadly; "that is impossible, now."

"And you are anxious he should not know that you and your daughter see each other."

"I am not so anxious," she said. "I have faith in Natalushka: I can perceive her courage. But perhaps it would be better."

"Very well. Then come to these other rooms I have got for you; they are in a more secluded neighborhood."

"Very well, monsieur. I have but few things with me. I will be ready soon."

In less than half an hour after that the French landlady was receiving her new guest; and so eager was she to show to the English gentleman her gratitude for his substantial presents, that her officious kindness was almost burdensome.

"I thank you," said the new-comer, with a smile, as the landlady brought her a cushion for her back the moment she sat down in the easy chair, "but I am not yet an invalid."

Then would madame have some tea? Or perhaps madame

had not dined? There was little in the house; but something could be prepared at once; from to-morrow morning madame's instructions would be fulfilled to the letter. To get rid of her, Brand informed her that madame had not dined, and would be glad to have anything that happened to be in the house. Then she left, and he was about to leave also.

"No," said the beautiful mother to him, with a smile on the pale face. "Sit down; I have something to say to you."

He sat down, his hat still in his hand.

"I have not thanked you," she said, "I see who has done all this: do you think a stranger would know to have the white-rose scent for me that Natalie uses? She was right: you are kind—you think of others."

"It is nothing—it is nothing," he said, hastily, and with all an Englishman's embarrassment.

"My dear friend," said his companion, with a grave kindness in her tone, and a look of affectionate interest in her eyes, "I am going to prove my gratitude to you. I am going to prevent—what do you call it?—a lover's quarrel."

He started.

"Yesterday," she continued, still regarding him in that kindly way, "before we left your rooms, Natalushka was very reserved toward you; was it not so? I perceived it; and you?"

"I—I thought she was tired," he stammered.

"To-morrow you are to fetch her here; and what if you find her still more reserved—even cold toward you? You will be pained, perhaps alarmed. Ah, my dear friend, life is made very bitter sometimes by mistakes; so it is that I must tell you the reason. The child loves you; be sure of that. Yes; but she thinks that she has been too frank in saying so—in time of trouble and anxiety; and now—now that you are perhaps not going to America—now that perhaps all the trouble is over—now she is beginning to think she ought to be a little more discreet, as other young ladies are. The child means no harm, but you and she must not quarrel."

He took her hand to bid her good-bye.

"Natalie and I are not likely to quarrel," said he, cheerfully. "Now I am going away. If I stayed, you would do nothing but talk about her, whereas it is necessary that you should have some dinner, then read one of these books for an hour or so, then go to bed and have a long, sound night's rest. You must be looking your brightest when she comes to see you to-morrow."

And indeed, as it turned out subsequently, this warning of

the mother's was not wholly unnecessary. Next day at eleven o'clock, as had previously been arranged, Brand met Natalie at the corner of Great Stanhope Street to escort her to the house to which her mother had removed. He had not even got into the park with her when he perceived that her manner was distinctly reserved. Anneli was with her, and she kept talking from time to time to the little maid, who was thus obliged, greatly against her will, to walk close to her mistress. At last Brand said,

"Natalie, have I offended you?"

"Oh no!" she said, in a hurried, low voice.

"Natalie," said he, very gently, "I once heard of a wicked creature who was determined to play the hypocrite, and might have done a great deal of mischief, only she had a most amiable mother, who stepped in and gave somebody else a warning. Did you ever hear of such a wicked person?"

The blood mounted to her face. By this time Anneli had taken leave to fall behind.

"Then," said the girl, with some hesitation, and yet with firmness, "you will not misunderstand me. If all the circumstances are to be altered, then—then you must forget what I have said to you in moments of trouble. I have a right to ask it. You must forget the past altogether."

"But it is impossible!"

"It is necessary."

For some minutes they walked on in silence. Then he felt a timid touch on his arm; her hand had been laid there, deprecatingly, for a moment.

"Are you angry with me?"

"No, I am not," said he, frankly, "for the very reason that what you ask is impossible, unnecessary, absurd. You might as well ask me to forget that I am alive. In any case, isn't it rather too soon? Are you so sure that all the trouble is past? Wait till the storm is well over, and we are going into port, then we will put on our Sunday manners to go ashore."

"I am afraid you are angry with me," she said again, timidly.

"You could not make me, if you tried," he said, simply; "but I am proud of you, Natalie—proud of the courage and clearness and frankness of your character, and I don't like to see you fall away from that, and begin to consider what a school-mistress would think of you."

"It is not what any one may think of me that I consider;

it is what I think of myself," she answered, in the same low voice.

They reached Hans Place. The mother was at the door of the room to welcome them. She took her daughter by the hand and led her in.

"Look round, Natalushka," she said. "Can you guess who has arranged all this for me—for me and for you?"

The girl almost instantly turned—her eyes cast down—and took her lover's hand, and kissed it in silence. That was all.

Then said he, lightly, as he shoved the low easy-chair nearer the fire,

"Come, madame, and sit down here; and you, Natalushka, here is a stool for you, that you will be able to lean your head on your mother's knee. There; it is a very pretty group: do you know why I make you into a picture? Well, you see, these are troubled times; and one has one's work to do; and who can tell what may happen? But don't you see that, whatever may happen, I can carry away with me this picture; and always, wherever I may be, I can say to myself that Natalie and her mother are together in the quiet little room, and that they are happy. Now I must bid you good-bye; I have a great deal of business to-day with my solicitor. And the landlady, madame: how does she serve you?"

"She overwhelms me with kindness."

"That is excellent," said he, as he shook hands with them and, against both their protests, took his leave.

He carried away that picture in his mind. He had left these two together, and they were happy. What mattered it to him what became of himself?

It was on the evening of that day that he had to obey the summons of the Council.

CHAPTER XL.

A CONCLAVE.

PUNCTUAL to the moment George Brand arrived in Lisle Street. He was shown into an inner room, where he found Lind seated at a desk, and Reitzei and Beratinsky standing by the fireplace. On an adjacent table where four cups of black coffee, four small glasses, a bottle of brandy, and a box of cigarettes.

Lind rose to receive him, and was very courteous indeed—apologizing for having had to break in on his preparations for leaving, and offering him coffee, cigarettes, and what not. When the new-comer had declined these, Lind resumed his place and begged the others to be seated.

“We will proceed to business at once, gentlemen,” said he, speaking in quite an ordinary and matter-of-fact way, “although, I will confess to you, it is not business entirely to my liking. Perhaps I should not say so. This paper, you see, contains my authorization from the Council to summon you and to explain the service they demand: perhaps I should merely obey, and say nothing. But we are friends; we can speak in confidence.”

Here Reitzei, who was even more pallid than usual, and whose fingers seemed somewhat shaky, filled one of the small glasses of brandy, and drank it off.

“I do not say that I hesitate,” continued Lind—“that I am reluctant, because the service that is required from us—from one of us four—is dangerous—is exceedingly dangerous. No,” he said, with a brief smile, “as far as I am myself concerned, I have carried my life in my hands too often to think much about that. And you, gentlemen, considering the obligations you have accepted, I take it that the question of possible harm to yourselves is not likely to interfere with your obedience to the commands of the Council.”

“As for me,” said Reitzei, eagerly and nervously, “I tell you this, I should like to have something exciting now—I do not care what. I am tired of this work in London; it is slow, regular, like the ticking of a clock. I am for something to stir the blood a little. I say that I am ready for anything.”

“As for me,” said Beratinsky, curtly, “no one has ever yet called me a coward.”

Brand said nothing; but he perceived that this was something unusually serious, and almost unconsciously he closed his right hand that he might feel the clasp of Natalie’s ring. There was no need to appeal to his oaths of allegiance.

Lind proceeded, in a graver fashion,

“Yes, I confess that personally I am for avoiding violence, for proceeding according to law. But then the Council would say, perhaps, ‘Are there not injuries for which the law gives no redress? Are there not those who are beyond the power of the law? And we, who have given our lives to the redressing of wrongs, to the protection of the poor, to the establishment of the right, are we to stand by and see the

moral sense of the community outraged by those in high places, and say no word, and lift no hand?"

He took up a book that was lying on the table, and opened it at a marked page.

"Yes," he said, "there are occasions on which a man may justly take the law into his own hands; may break the law, and go beyond it, and punish those whom the law has failed to punish; and the moral sense of the world will say, 'Well done!' Did you ever happen to read, Mr. Brand, the letter written by Madame von Maderspach?"

Brand started at the mention of the name: it recalled the first evening on which he had seen Natalie. What strange things had happened since then! He answered that he did not know of Madame von Maderspach's letter.

"By chance I came across it to-day," said Lind, looking at the book. "Listen: 'I was torn from the arms of my husband, from the circle of my children, from the hallowed sanctuary of my home, charged with no offence, allowed no hearing, arraigned before no judge. I, a woman, wife, and mother, was in my own native town, before the people accustomed to treat me with respect, dragged into a square of soldiers, and there scourged with rods. Look, I can write this without dropping dead! But my husband killed himself. Robbed of all other weapons, he shot himself with a pocket-pistol. The people rose, and would have killed those who instigated these horrors, but their lives were saved by the interference of the military.' Very well. Von Maderspach took his own way; he shot himself. But if, instead of doing that, he had taken the law into his own hands, and killed the author of such an outrage, do you think there is a human being in the world who would have blamed him?"

He appealed directly to Brand. Brand answered calmly, but with his face grown rather white, "I think if such a thing were done to—to my wife, I would have a shot at somebody."

Perhaps Lind thought that it was the recital of the wrongs of Madame von Maderspach that had made this man's face grow white, and given him that look about the mouth; but at all events he continued, "Exactly so. I was only seeking to show you that there are occasions on which a man might justly take the law into his own hands. Well, then, some would argue—I don't say so myself, but some would say—that what a man may do justly an association may do justly. What would the quick-spreading civilization of America have done but for the Lynch tribunals? The respectable people

said to themselves, 'it is question of life or death. We have to attack those scoundrels at once, or society will be destroyed. We cannot wait for the law: it is powerless.' And so when the president had given his decision, out they went and caught the scoundrels, and strung them up to the nearest tree. You do not call them murderers. John Lynch ought to have a statue in every Western State in America."

"Certainly, certainly!" exclaimed Reitzei, reaching over and filling out another glass of brandy with an unsteady hand. He was usually an exceedingly temperate person. "We are all agreed. Justice must be done, whether the law allows or not; I say the quicker the better."

Lind paid no heed to him, but proceeded quietly, "Now I will come more directly to what is required of us by the Council; I have been trying to guess at their view of the question; perhaps I am altogether wrong; but no matter. And I will ask you to imagine yourselves not here in this free country of England, where the law is strong—and not only that, but you have a public opinion that is stronger still—and where it is not possible that a great Churchman should be a man living in open iniquity, and an oppressor and a scoundrel—I will ask you to imagine yourselves living in Italy, let one say in the Papal Territory itself, where the reign of Christ should be, and where the poor should be cared for, if there is Christianity still on the earth. And you are poor, let us say; hardly knowing how to scrape together a handful of food sometimes; and your children ragged and hungry; and you forced from time to time to go to the Monte di Pieta to pawn your small belongings, or else you will die, or you will see your children die before your eyes."

"Ah, yes, yes!" exclaimed Reitzei. "That is the worst of it—to see one's children die! That is worse than one's own hunger."

"And you," continued Lind, quietly, but still with a little more distinctness of emphasis, "you, you poor devils, you see a great dignitary of the Church, a great prince among priests, living in shameless luxury, in violation of every law, human and divine, with the children of his mistresses set up in palaces, himself living on the fat of the land. What law does he not break, this libertine, this usurer? What makes the corn dear, so that you cannot get it for your starving children?—what but this plunderer, this robber, seizing the funds that extremity has dragged from the poor in order to buy up the grain of the States? A pretty speculation! No wonder that you murmur and complain; that you curse

him under your breath ; that you call him *il cardinale affamatore*. And no wonder, if you happen to belong to a great association that has promised to see justice done, no wonder you come to that association and say, ' Masters, why cannot justice be done now ? It is too long to wait for the Millennium. Remove this oppressor from the face of the earth : down with the Starving Cardinal ! ' "

" Yes, yes, yes ! " cried Reitzei, excitedly. Beratinsky sat silent and sullen. Brand, with some strange foreboding of what was coming, still sat with his hand tight closed on Natalie's ring.

" More," continued Lind—and now, if he was acting, it was a rare piece of acting, for wrath and indignation gathered on his brow, and increased the emphasis of his voice—" it is not only your purses, it is not only your poor starved homesteadings that are attacked, it is the honor of your women. Whose sister or daughter is safe ? Mr. Brand, one of your English poets has made the poor cry to the rich,

" ' Our sons are your slaves by day,
Our daughters your slaves by night.' "

But what if some day a poor man—I will tell you his name—his name is De Bedros ; he is not a peasant, but a helpless, poor old man—what if this man comes to the great association that I have mentioned and says, wringing his hands, ' My Brothers and Companions, you have sworn to protect the weak and avenge the injured : what is your oath worth if you do not help me now ? My daughter, my only daughter, has been taken from me, she has been stolen from my side, shrieking with fear, and I thrown bleeding into the ditch. By whom ? By one who is beyond the law ; who laughs at the law ; who is the law ! But you—you will be the avengers. Too long has this monster outraged the name of Christ and insulted the forbearance of his fellow creatures : my Brothers, this is what I demand from your hands—I demand from the SOCIETY OF THE SEVEN STARS—I demand from you, the Council—I demand, my Brothers and Companions, a decree of death against the monster Zaccatelli ! ' "

" Yes, yes, yes, the decree ! " shouted Reitzei, all trembling. " Who could refuse it ? Or I myself—"

" Gentlemen," said Lind, calmly, " the decree has been granted. Here is my authority ; read it."

He held out the paper first of all to Brand, who took it in both his hands, and forced himself to go over it. But he

could not read it very carefully ; his heart was beating quickly ; he was thinking of a great many things all at once—of Lord Evelyn, of Natalie, of his oaths to the Society, even of his Berkshire home and the beech-woods. He handed on the paper to Reitzei, who was far too much excited to read it at all. Beratinsky merely glanced at it carelessly, and put it back on the table.

“Gentlemen,” Lind continued, returning to his unemotional manner, “personally, I consider it just that this man, whom the law cannot or does not choose to reach, should be punished for his long career of cruelty, oppression, and crime, and punished with death ! but, as I confessed to you before, I could have wished that that punishment had not been delivered by our hands. We have made great progress in England ; and we have been preaching nothing but peace and good-will, and the use of lawful means of amelioration. If this deed is traced to our Society, as it almost certainly will be, it will do us a vast amount of injury here ; for the English people will not be able to understand that such a state of affairs as I have described can exist, or that this is the only remedy. As I said to you before, it is with great reluctance that I summoned you here to-night—”

“Why so, Brother Lind ?” Reitzei broke in, and again he reached over for the bottle. “We are not cowards, then ?”

Beratinsky took the bottle from him and put it back on the table.

Reitzei did not resent this interference ; he only tried to roll up a cigarette, and did not succeed very well with his trembling fingers.

“You will have seen,” said Lind, continuing as if there had been no interruption, “why the Council have demanded this duty of the English section. The lesson would be thrown away altogether—a valuable life belonging to the Society would be lost—if it were supposed that this was an act of private revenge. No ; the death of Cardinal Zaccatelli will be a warning that Europe will take to heart. At least,” he added, thoughtfully, “I hope it will prove to be so, and I hope it will be unnecessary to repeat the warning.”

“You are exceedingly tender-hearted, Brother Lind,” said Reitzei. “Do you pity this man, then ? Do you think he should flourish his crimes in the face of the world for another twenty, thirty years ?”

“It is unnecessary to say what I think,” observed Lind, in the same quiet fashion. “It is enough for us that we know our duty. The Council have commanded ; we obey.”

"Yes ; but let us come to the point, Brother Lind," said Beratinsky, in a somewhat surly fashion. "I do not much care what happens to me ; yet one wishes to know."

"Gentlemen," said Lind, composedly, "you know that among the ordinances of the Society is one to the effect that no member shall be sent on any duty involving peril to his life without a ballot among at least four persons. As this particular service is one demanding great secrecy and circumspection, I have considered it right to limit the ballot to four—to ourselves, in fact."

There was not a word said.

"That the duty involves peril to life is obvious ; it will be a miracle if he who undertakes this affair should escape. As for myself, you will perceive by the paper you have read that I am commissioned by the Council to form the ballot, but not instructed to include myself. I could avoid doing so if I chose, but when I ask my friends to run a risk, I am willing to take the same risk. For the rest, I have been in as dangerous enterprises before."

He leaned over and pulled toward him a sheet of paper. Then he took a pair of scissors and cut the sheet into four pieces ; these he proceeded to fold up until they were about the size of a shilling, and identically alike. All the time he was talking.

"Yes, it will be a dangerous business," he said, slowly, "and one requiring great forethought and caution. Then I do not say it is altogether impossible one might escape ; though then the warning, the lesson of this act of punishment might not be so effective : they might mistake it for a Camorra affair, though the Cardinal himself already knows otherwise."

He opened a bottle of red ink that stood by.

"The simplest means are sufficient," said he. "This is how we used to settle affairs in '48."

He opened one of the pieces of paper, and put a cross in red on it, which he dried on the blotting-paper. Then he folded it up again, threw the four pieces into a pasteboard box, put down the lid, and shook the box lightly.

"Whoever draws the red cross," he said, almost indifferently, "carries out the command of the Council. Have you anything to say, gentlemen—to suggest ?"

"Yes," said Reitzei, boldly.

Lind regarded him.

"What is the use of the ballot ?" said the pallid-faced young man. "What if one volunteers ? I should myself like to settle the business of the scoundrelly Cardinal."

Lind shook his head.

"Impossible. Calabressa thought of a volunteer ; he was mad ! There must be a ballot. Come ; shall we proceed ?"

He opened the box and put it before Beratinsky. Beratinsky took out one of the papers, opened it, glanced at it, crumpled it up, and threw it into the fire.

"It isn't I, at all events," he said.

It was Reitzei next. When he glanced at the paper he had drawn, he crushed it together with an oath, and dashed it on the floor.

"Of course, of course," he exclaimed, "just when I was eager for a bit of active service. So it is you, Brother Lind. or our friend Brand who is to settle the business of the Starving Cardinal."

Calmly, almost as a matter of course, Lind handed the box to George Brand ; and he, being a proud man, and in the presence of foreigners, was resolved to show no sign of emotion whatever. When he took out the paper and opened it, and saw his fate there in the red cross, he laid it on the table before him without a word. Then he shut his hand on Natalie's ring.

"Well," said Lind, rather sadly, as he took out the remaining paper without looking at it, and threw aside the box, "I almost regret it, as between you and me. I have less of life to look forward to."

"I would like to ask one question," said Brand, rising : he was perfectly firm.

"Yes ?"

"The orders of the Council must be obeyed. I only wish to know whether—when—when this thing comes to be done—I must declare my own name ?"

"Not at all—not at all !" Lind said, quickly. "You may use any name you like."

"I am glad of that," he said. Then, with the same proud, impassive firmness, he made an appointment for the next day, got his hat and coat, bade his companions good-night, and went down-stairs into the cold night air. He could not realize as yet all that had happened, but his first quick, instinctive thought had been,

"Ah, not that—not the name that my mother bore !"

CHAPTER XLI.

IN THE DEEPS.

THE sudden shock of the cold night air was a relief to his burning brain ; and so also as he passed into the crowded streets, was the low continuous thunder all around him. The theatres were coming out ; cabs, omnibuses, carriages added to the muffled roar ; the pavements were thronged with people talking, laughing, jostling, calling out one to the other. He was glad to lose himself in this seething multitude ; he was glad to be hidden by the darkness ; he would try to think.

But his thoughts were too rapid and terrible to be very clear. He only vaguely knew—it was a consciousness that seemed to possess both heart and brain like a consuming fire—that the beautiful dreams he had been dreaming of a future beyond the wide Atlantic, with Natalie living and working by his side, her proud spirit cheering him on, and refusing to be daunted—these dreams had been suddenly snatched away from him ; and in their stead, right before him, stood this pitiless, inexorable fate. He could not quite tell how it had all occurred, but there at least was the horrible certainty, staring him right in the face. He could not avoid it ; he could not shut his eyes to it, or draw back from it ; there was no escape. Then some wild desire to have the thing done at once possessed him. At once—at once—and then the grave would cover over his remorse and despair. Natalie would forget ; she had her mother now to console her. Evelyn would say, “Poor devil, he was not the first who got into mischief by meddling in schemes without knowing how far he might have to go.” Then amidst all this confused din of the London streets, what was the phrase that kept ringing in his ears ?—“*And when she bids die he shall surely die !*” But he no longer heard the pathetic vibration of Natalie Lind’s voice ; the words seemed to him solemn, and distant, and hopeless, like a knell. But only if it were over—that was again his wild desire. In the grave was forgetfulness and peace.

Presently a curious fancy seized him. At the corner of Windmill Street a ragged youth was bawling out the name of a French journal. Brand bought a copy of the journal, passed on, and walked into an adjacent cafe, and took a seat at one of the small tables. A waiter came to him, and he mechanic-

ally ordered coffee. He began to search this newspaper for the array of paragraphs usually headed *Tribunaux*.

At last, in the corner of the newspaper, he found that heading, though under it there was nothing of any importance or interest. But it was the heading itself that had a strange fascination for him. He kept his eyes fixed on it. Then he began to see detached phrases and sentences—or, perhaps, it was only in his brain that he saw them: “The Assassination of Count Zaccatelli! The accused, an Englishman, who refuses to declare his name, admits that he had no personal enmity—commanded to execute this horrible crime—a punishment decreed by a society which he will not name—confesses his guilt—is anxious to be sentenced at once, and to die as soon as the law permits. . . . This morning the assassin of Cardinal Zaccatelli, who has declared his name to be Edward Bernard, was executed.”

He hurriedly folded up the paper, just as if he were afraid of some one overlooking and reading these words, and glanced around. No one was regarding him. The cafe was nearly full, and there was plenty of laughing and talking amidst the glare of the gas. He slunk out of the place, leaving the coffee untasted. But when he had got outside he straightened himself up, and his face assumed a firmer expression. He walked quickly along to Clarges Street. The Evelyns’ house was dark from top to bottom; apparently the family had retired for the night. “Perhaps he is at the Century,” Brand said to himself, as he started off again. But just as he got to the corner of the street a hansom drove up, and the driver taking the corner too quickly, sent the wheel on to the curb.

“Why don’t you look where you’re going to?” a voice called out from the inside of the cab.

“Is that you, Evelyn?” Brand cried.

“Yes, it is,” was the reply; and the hansom was stopped, and Lord Evelyn descended. “I am happy to say that I can still answer for myself. I thought we were in for a smash.”

“Can you spare me five minutes?”

“Five hours if you like.”

The man was paid; the two friends walked along the pavement together.

“I am glad to have found you after all, Evelyn,” Brand said. “The fact is, my nerves have had a bad shake.”

“I never knew you had any. I always fancied you could drive a fire-brigade engine full gallop along the Strand on a wet night, with the theatres coming out.”

"A few minutes' talk with you will help me to pull myself together again. Need we go into the house?"

"We sha'n't wake anybody."

They noiselessly went into the house, and passed along the hall until they reached a small room behind the dining-room. The gas was lit, burning low. There were biscuits, seltzer-water, and spirits on the table.

Lord Evelyn was in the act of turning the gas higher, when he happened to catch sight of his friend. He uttered a quick exclamation. Brand, who sat down in a chair, was crying, with his hands over his face, like a woman.

"Great heavens, what is it, Brand?"

That confession of weakness did not last long. Brand rose to his feet impatiently, and took a turn or two up and down the small room.

"What is it? Well, I have received my sentence to-night, Evelyn. But it isn't that—it is the thought of those I shall leave behind—Natalie, and those boys of my sister's—if people were to find out after all that they were related to me!"

He was looking at the things that presented themselves to his own mind; he forgot that Evelyn could not understand; he almost forgot that he was speaking aloud. But by-and-by he got himself better under control. He sat down again. He forced himself to speak calmly: the only sign of emotion was that his face was rather pale, and his eyes looked tired and harassed.

"Yes, I told you my nervous system had got a shock, Evelyn; but I think I have got over it. It won't do for me in my position to abandon one's self to sentiment."

"I wish you would tell me what you mean."

Brand regarded him.

"I cannot tell you the whole thing, but this will be enough. The Council have decreed the death of a certain person, and I am appointed his executioner."

"You are raving mad!"

"Perhaps it would be better if I were," he said, with a sigh. "However, such is the fact. The ballot was taken to-night; the lot fell to me. I have no one to blame except myself."

Lord Evelyn was too horrified to speak. The calm manner of his companion ought to have carried conviction with it; and yet—and yet—how could such a thing be possible?

"Yes, I blame myself," Brand said, "for not having made certain reservations when pledging myself to the Society. But how was one to think of such things? When Lind used

to denounce the outrages of the Nihilists, and talk with indignation of the useless crimes of the Camorra, how could one have thought it possible that assassination should be demanded of you as a duty?"

"But Lind," Lord Evelyn exclaimed—"surely Lind does not approve of such a thing?"

"No, he does not," Brand answered. "He says it will prove a misfortune—"

"Then why does he not protest?"

"Protest against a decree of the Council!" the other exclaimed. "You don't know as much as I do, Evelyn, about that Council. No, I have sworn obedience, and I will obey."

He had recovered his firmness; he seemed resigned—even resolved. It was his friend who was excited.

"I tell you all the oaths in the world cannot compel a man to commit murder," Evelyn said, hotly.

"Oh, they don't call it murder," Brand replied, without any bitterness whatever; "they call it a punishment, a warning to the evil-doers of Europe. And no doubt this man is a great scoundrel, and cannot be reached by the law; and then, besides, one of the members of the Society, who is poor and old, and who has suffered grievous wrong from this man, has appealed to the Council to avenge him. No; I can see their positions. I have no doubt they believe they are acting justly."

"But you yourself do not think so."

"My dear fellow, it is not for the private soldier to ask whether his sovereign has gone to war justly or unjustly. It is his business to obey commands—to kill, if need be—according to his oath."

"Why, you are taking the thing as a matter of course," Lord Evelyn cried, indignantly. "I cannot believe it possible yet! And—and if it were possible—consider how I should upbraid myself: it was I who led you into this affair, Brand."

"Oh no," said the other, absently.

He was staring into the smouldering fire; and for a second or two he sat in silence. Then he said, slowly and thoughtfully,

"I am afraid I have led a very selfish life. Natalie would not say so; she is generous. But it is true. Well, this will make some atonement. She will know that I kept my word to her. She gave me that ring, Evelyn."

He held out his hand for a moment.

"It was a pledge that I should never draw back from my allegiance to the Society. Well, neither she nor I then fan-

cied this thing could happen ; but now I am not going to turn coward. You saw me show the white feather, Evelyn, for a minute or two : I don't think it was about myself ; it **was** about her—and—and one or two others. You see our talking together has sent off all that nervous excitement ; now we can speak about business—”

“ I will not—I will not ! ” Evelyn said, still greatly moved. “ I will go to Lind himself. I will tell him that no duty of this kind was ever contemplated by any one joining here. It may be all very well for Naples or Sicily ; it won't do for the people on this side the Channel : it will ruin his work : he must appeal—I will drive him to it ! ”

“ My dear fellow,” Brand said, quietly, “ I told you Lind has accepted the execution of this affair with reluctance. He knows it will do our work—well, my share in it will be soon over—no good. But in this business there is no appeal. You are only a companion ; you don't know what stringent vows you have to undertake when you get into the other grades. Moreover, I must tell you this thing to his credit. He is not bound to take the risk of the ballot himself, but he did to-night. It is all over and settled, Evelyn. What is one man's life, more or less ? People go to throw away hundreds of thousands of lives ‘ with a light heart. ’ And even if this affair should give a slight shock to some of our friends here, the effect will not be permanent. The organization is too big, too strong, too eager, to be really injured by such a trifle. I want to talk about business matters now.”

“ I won't hear you—I will not allow this,” Lord Evelyn protested, trembling with excitement.

“ You must hear me ; the time is short,” Brand said, with decision. “ When this thing has to be done I don't know ; I shall probably hear to-morrow ; but I must at once take steps to prevent shame falling on the few relatives I have. I shall pretend to set out on some hunting-expedition or other—Africa is a good big place for one to lose one's self in—and if I do not return, what then ? I shall leave you my executor, Evelyn ; or, rather, it will be safer to do the whole thing by deed of gift. I shall give my eldest sister's son the Buckinghamshire place ; then I must leave the other one something. Five hundred pounds at four per cent. would pay that poor devil Kirski's rent for him, and help him on a bit. Then I am going to make you a present, Evelyn ; so you see you shall benefit too. Then as for Natalie—or rather, her mother—”

“ Her mother ! ” Evelyn stared at him.

“ Natalie's mother is in London : you will learn her story

from herself," Brand continued, briefly. "In the mean time, do not tell Lind until she permits you. I have taken rooms for her in Hans Place, and Natalie will no doubt go to see her each day; but I am afraid the poor lady is not very well off, for the family has always been in political troubles. Well, you see, Evelyn, I could leave you a certain sum, the interest of which you could manage to convey to her in some roundabout and delicate way that would not hurt her pride. You could do this, of course."

"But you are talking as if your death was certain!" Lord Evelyn exclaimed, rather wildly. "Even if it is all true, you might escape,"

Brand turned away his head as he spoke.

"Do you think, then," he said, slowly, "that, even if that were possible, I should care to live red-handed? The Council cannot demand that of me too. If there is one bullet for him, the next one will be for myself; and if I miss the first shot I shall make sure about the second. There will be no examination of the prisoner, as far as I am concerned. I shall leave a paper stating the object and cause of my attempt; but I shall go into it nameless, and the happiest thing I can hope for is that forgetfulness will gather round it and me as speedily as may be."

Lord Evelyn was deeply distressed. He could no longer refuse to believe; and inadvertently he bethought himself of the time when he had besought and entreated this old friend of his to join the great movement that was to regenerate Europe. Was this the end, then—a vulgar crime?—the strong, manly, generous life to be thrown away, and Natalie left broken-hearted?

"What about her?" he asked, timidly.

"About Natalie, do you mean?" said Brand, starting somewhat. "Curiously enough, I was thinking about her also. I was wondering whether it could be concealed from her—whether it would not be better to let her imagine with the others that I had got drowned or killed somewhere. But I could not do that. The uncertainty would hang over her for years. Better the sharp pain at once—of parting; then her mother must take charge of her and console her, and be kind to her. What I fear most is that she may blame herself—she may fancy that she is some how responsible—"

"It is I, surely, who must take that blame on myself," said Lord Evelyn, sadly. "But for me, how could you have been led into joining the Society?"

"Neither she nor you have anything to reproach yourselves

with. What was my life worth to me when I joined? Then for a time I saw a vision of what may yet be in the world—of what will be, please God; and what does it matter if one here or one there falls out of the ranks?—the great army is moving on: and for a time there were others visions. Poor Natalie!—I am glad her mother has come to her at last.”

He rose.

“I wish I could offer you a bed here,” Lord Evelyn said.

“I have a great many things to arrange to-night,” he answered, simply. “Perhaps I may not be able to get to bed at all.”

Lord Evelyn hesitated.

“When can I see you to-morrow?” he said at length. “You know I am going to Lind the first thing in the morning.”

Brand stopped abruptly.

“I must absolutely forbid your doing anything of the kind,” said he, firmly. “This is a matter of the greatest secrecy; there is to be no talking about it; I have given you some hint, and the same I shall give to Natalie, and there an end.” He added, “Your interference would be quite useless, Evelyn. The matter is not in Lind’s hands.

He bade his friend good-night.

“Thank you for letting me bore you so long. You see, I expected talking over the thing would drive off that first shock of nervousness. Now I am going to play the part of Karl Sand with indifference. When you hear of me, you will think I must have been brought up by the Tugendbund or the Carbonari, or some of those societies.”

“This cheerfulness did not quite deceive Lord Evelyn. He bade his friend good-night with some sadness; his mind was not at ease about the share he attributed to himself in this calamity.

When Brand reached his chambers in Buckingham Street there was a small parcel awaiting him. He opened it, and found a box with, inside, a tiny nosegay of sweet-smelling flowers. These were not half as splendid as those he had got the previous afternoon for the rooms in Hans Place, but there was something accompanying them that gave them sufficient value. It was a strip of paper, and on it was written—“From Natalie and from Natalushka, with more than thanks.”

“I will carry them with me,” he thought to himself, “until the day of my death. Perhaps they may not have quite withered by then.”

CHAPTER XLII.

A COMMUNICATION.

Now, he said to himself, he would think no more ; he would act. The long talk with Lord Evelyn had enabled him to pull himself together ; there would be no repetition of that half-hysterical collapse. More than one of his officer-friends had confessed to him that they had spent the night before their first battle in abject terror, but that that had all gone off as soon as they were called into action. And as for himself, he had many things to arrange before starting on this hunting-expedition, which was to serve as a cloak for another enterprise. He would have to write at once, for example, to his sister—an invalid widow, who passed her life alternately on the Riviera and in Switzerland—informing her of his intended travels. He would have to see that a sufficient sum was left for Natalie's mother, and put into discreet hands. The money for the man Kirski would have to be properly tied up, lest it should prove a temptation. Why, those two pieces of Italian embroidery lying there, he had bought them months ago, intending to present them to Natalie, but from time to time the opportunity had been missed. And so forth, and so forth.

But despite all this fortitude, and these commonplace and practical considerations, his eyes would wander to that little handful of flowers lying on the table, and his thoughts would wander farther still. As he pictured to himself his going to the young Hungarian girl, and taking her hand, and telling her that now it was no longer a parting for a couple of years, but a parting forever, his heart grew cold and sick. He thought of her terrified eyes, of her self-reproaches, of her entreaties, perhaps.

"I wish Evelyn would tell her," he murmured aloud, and he went to the window. "Surely it would be better if I were never to see her again."

It was a long and agonizing night, despite all his resolutions. The gray morning, appearing palely over the river and the bridges, found him still pacing up and down there, with nothing settled at all, no letter written, no memoranda made. All that the night had done was to increase a hundred-fold his dread of meeting Natalie. And now the daylight only told him that that interview was coming nearer. It had become a question of hours.

At last, worn out with fatigue and despair, he threw himself on a couch hard by, and presently sunk into a broken and troubled sleep. For now the mind, emancipated from the control of the will, ran riot; and the quick-changing pictures that were presented to him were full of fearful things that shook his very life with terror. Awake he could force himself to think of this or that; asleep, he was at the mercy of this lurid imagination that seemed to dye each successive scene in the hue of blood. First of all, he was in a great cathedral, sombre and vast, and by the dim light of the candles he saw that some solemn ceremony was going forward. Priests, mitred and robed, sat in a semicircle in front of the altar; on the altar-steps were three figures; behind the altar a space of gloom, from whence issued the soft, clear singing of the choristers. Then, suddenly, into that clear sweet singing broke a loud blare of trumpets; a man bounded on to the altar-steps; there was the flash of a blade—a shriek—a fall; then the roar of a crowd, sullen, and distant, and awful. It is the cry of a great city; and this poor crouching fugitive, who hides behind the fountain in the Place, is watching for his chance to dart away into some place of safety. But the crowd have let him pass; they are merciful; they are glad of the death of their enemy; it is only the police he has to fear. What lane is dark enough? What ruins must he haunt, like a dog, in the night-time? But the night is full of fire, and the stars overhead are red, and everywhere there is a roar and a murmur—the assassination of the Cardinal!

Well, it is quieter in this dungeon; and soon there will be an end, and peace. But for the letters of fire that burns one's brain the place would be as black as night; and it is still as night; one can sit and listen. And now that dull throbbing sound—and a strain of music—is it the young wife who, all unknowing, is digging her husband's grave? How sad she is! She pities the poor prisoner, whoever he may be. She would not dig this grave if she knew: she calls herself *Fidelio*; she is faithful to her love. But now—but now—though this hole is black as night, and silent, and the waters are lapping outside, cannot one know what is passing there? There are some who are born to be happy. Ah, look at the faithful wife now, as she strikes off her husband's fetters—listen to the glad music, *destin ormai felice!*—they take each other's hand—they go away proudly into the glad daylight—husband and wife together for evermore. This poor prisoner listens, though his heart will break. The happy music grows more and more faint—the husband and wife are together now—the beautiful

white day is around them—the poor prisoner is left alone : there is no one even coming to bid him farewell.

The sleeper moaned in his sleep, and stretched out his hand as if to seek some other hand.

“No one—not even a word of good-bye !” he murmured.

But then the dream changed. And now it was a wild and windy day in the blowing month of March, and the streams in this Buckinghamshire valley were swollen, and the woods were bare. Who are these two who come into the small and bleak church-yard ? They are a mother and daughter ; they are all in black ; and the face of the daughter is pale, and her eyes filled with tears. Her face is white, and the flowers she carries are white, and that is the white tombstone there in the corner—apart from the others. See how she kneels down at the foot of the grave, and puts the flowers lightly on the grass, and clasps her trembling hands, and prays.

“*Natalie—my wife !*” he calls in his sleep.

And behold ! the white tombstone has letters of fire written on it, and the white flowers are changed to drops of blood, and the two black figures have hurried away and disappeared. How the wind tears down this wide valley, in which there is no sign of life. It is so sad to be left alone.

Well, it was about eight o'clock when he was awakened by the entrance of Waters. He jumped up, and looked around, haggard and bewildered. Then his first thought was,

“A few more nights like this, and Zaccatelli will have little to fear.”

He had his bath and breakfast ; all the time he was forcing himself into an indignant self-contempt. He held out his hand before him, expecting to see it tremble : but no. This reassured him somewhat.

A little before eleven he was at the house in Hans Place. He was immediately shown up-stairs. Natalie's mother was there to receive him ; she did not notice he looked tired.

“Natalie is coming to you this morning ?” he said.

“Oh yes ; why not ? It gives her pleasure ; it gives me joy. But I will not keep the child always in the house ; no, she must have her walk. Yesterday, after you had left, we went to a very secluded place—a church not far from here, and a cemetery behind.”

“Oh, yes ; I know,” he said. “But you might have chosen a more cheerful place for your walk.”

“Any place is cheerful enough for me when my daughter is with me,” said she, simply ; “and it is quiet.”

George Brand sat with his hands clinched. Every moment he thought he should hear Natalie knock at the door below.

"Madame," he said, with some little hesitation, "something has happened of serious importance—I mean, of a little importance. When Natalie comes I must tell her—"

"And you wish to see her alone, perhaps?" said the mother, lightly. "Why not? And listen—it is she herself, I believe!"

A minute afterward the door was opened, and Natalie entered, radiant, happy, with glad eyes. Then she started when she saw George Brand there, but there was no fear in her look. On the contrary, she embraced her mother; then she went to him, and said, with a pleased flush in her face,

"I had no message this morning. You did not care, then, for our little bunch of flowers?"

He took her hand, and held it for a second.

"I thought I should see you to-day, Natalie; I have something to tell you."

Her face grew graver.

"Is it something serious?"

"Well," said he, to gain time, for the mother was still in the room, "it is serious or not serious, as you like to take it. It does not involve the fate of a nation, for example."

"It is mysterious, at all events."

At this moment the elder woman took occasion to slip noiselessly from the room.

"Natalie," said he, "sit down here by me."

She put the footstool on which she was accustomed to sit at her mother's side close to his chair, and seated herself. He took her hand and held it tight.

"Natalie," said he, in a low voice—and he was himself rather pale—"I am going to tell you something that may perhaps startle you, and even grieve you; but you must keep command over yourself, or you will alarm your mother—"

"You are not in danger?" she cried, quickly, but in a low voice: there was something in his tone that alarmed her.

"The thing is simple enough," he said, with a forced composure. "You know that when one has joined a certain Society, and especially when one has accepted the responsibilities I have, there is nothing that may not be demanded. Look at this ring, Natalie."

"Yes, yes," she said, breathlessly.

"That is a sufficient pledge, even if there were no others. I have sworn allegiance to the Society at all hazards; I cannot retreat now."

"But is it so very terrible?" she said, hurriedly. "Dearest, I will come over to you in America. I have told my mother; she will take me to you—"

"I am not going to America, Natalie."

She looked up bewildered.

"I have been commissioned to perform another duty, more immediate, more definite. And I must tell you now, Natalie, all that I dare tell you: you must be prepared; it is a duty which will cost me my life!"

"Your life?" she repeated, in a bewildered, wild way, and she hastily drew her hand away from his. "Your life?"

"Hush, Natalie!"

"You are to die!" she exclaimed, and she gazed with terror-stricken eyes into his face. She forgot all about his allegiance to the Society; she forgot all about her theories of self-sacrifice; she only heard that the man she loved was doomed, and she said, in a low, hoarse voice, "And it is I, then, who have murdered you!"

"Natalie!" he cried, and he would have taken her hand again, but she withdrew from him, shuddering. She clasped her hands over her face.

"Oh, do not touch me," she said, "do not come near me. I have murdered you: it is I who have murdered you!"

"For Heaven's sake, Natalie, be calm!" he said to her, in a low, earnest voice. "Think of your mother: do not alarm her. You knew we might be parted for years—well, this parting is a little worse to bear, that is all—and you, who gave me this ring, you are not going to say a word of regret. No, no, Natalushka, many thousands and thousands of people in the world have gone through what stands before us now, and wives have parted from their husbands without a single tear, so proud were they."

She looked up quickly; her face was white.

"I have no tears," she said, "none! But some wives have gone with their husbands into the danger, and have died too—ah, how happy that were for any one!—and I, why may not I go? I am not afraid to die."

He laid his hand gently on the dark hair.

"My child, it is impossible," he said; and then he added, rather sadly, "It is not an enterprise that any one is likely to gain any honor by—it is far from that; but it has to be undertaken—that is enough. As for you—you have your mother to care for now; will not that fill your life with gladness?"

"How soon—do—you go away?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Almost immediately," he said, watching her. She had not shed a single tear, but there was a strange look on her face. "Nothing is to be said about it. I shall be supposed to have started on a travelling-expedition, that is all."

"And you go—forever?"

"Yes."

She rose.

"We shall see you yet before you go?"

"Natalie," he said, in despair, "I had come to try to say good-bye to you; but I cannot, my darling, I cannot! I must see you again."

"I do not understand why you should wish to see again one like me," she said, slowly, and the voice did not sound like her own voice. "I have given you over to death: and, more than that, to a death that is not honorable; and, yet I cannot even tell you that I am grieved. But there is pain here." She put her hand over her heart; she staggered back a little bit; he caught her.

"Natalie—Natalie!"

"It is a pain that kills," she said, wildly.

"Natalie, where is your courage? I give my life without question; you must bear your part too."

She still held her hand over her bosom.

"Yet," she said, as if she had not heard him, "that is what they say; it kills, this pain in the heart. Why not—if one does not wish to live?"

At this moment the door was opened, and the mother came into the room.

"Madame," said Brand, quickly, "come and speak to your daughter. I have had to tell her something that has upset her, perhaps, for a moment; but you will console her; she is brave."

"Child, how you tremble, and how cold your hands are!" the mother cried.

"It does not matter, mother. From every pain there is a release, is there not?"

"I do not understand you, Natalushka?"

"And I—and I, mother—"

She was on the point of breaking down, but she held firm. Then she released herself from her mother's hold, and went forward and took her lover's hand, and regarded him with the sad, fearless, beautiful eyes.

"I have been selfish," she said; "I have been thinking of myself, when that is needless. For me there will be a re-

lease—quickly enough: I shall pray for it. Now tell me what I must do: I will obey you.”

“First, then,” said he, speaking in a low voice, and in English, so that her mother should not understand, “you must make light of this affair, or you will distress your mother greatly, and she is not able to bear distress. Some day, if you think it right, you may tell her; you know nothing that could put the enterprise in peril; she will be as discreet and silent as yourself, Natalie. Then you must put it out of your mind, my darling, that you have any share in what has occurred. What have I to regret? My life was worthless to me; you made it beautiful for a time; perhaps, who knows, it may after all turn out to have been of some service, and then there can be no regret at all. They think so, and it is not for me to question.”

“May I not tell my mother now?” she said, imploringly. “Dearest, how can I speak to her, and be thinking of you far away?”

“As you please, Natalie. The little I have told you or Evelyn can do no harm, so long as you keep it among yourselves.”

“But I shall see again?” It was her heart that cried to him.

“Oh yes, Natalie,” he said, gravely. “I may not have to leave England for a week or two. I will see you as often as I can until I go, my darling, though it may only be torture to you.”

“Torture?” she said, sadly. “That will come after—until there is an end of the pain.”

“Hush, you must not talk like that. You have now one with you whom it is your duty to support and console. She has not had a very happy life either, Natalie.”

He was glad now that he was able to leave this terror-stricken girl in such tender hands. And as for himself, he found, when he had left, that somehow the strengthening of another had strengthened himself. He had less dread of the future; his face was firm; the time for vain regrets was over.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A QUARREL.

MEANWHILE, almost immediately after George Brand had left the house in Lisle Street, Reitzei and Beratinsky left also. On shutting the street-door behind them, Beratinsky bade a curt good-night to his companion, and turned to go ; but Reitzei, who seemed to be in very high spirits, stayed him.

"No, no, friend Beratinsky ; after such a fine night's work I say we must have a glass of wine together. We will walk up to the Culturverein."

"It is late," said the other, somewhat ungraciously.

"Never mind. An hour, three-quarters of an hour, half an hour, what matter ? Come," said he, laying hold of his arm and taking him away unwillingly, "it is not polite of you to force me to invite myself. I do not suppose it is the cost of the wine you are thinking of. Mark my words : when I am elected a member, I shall not be stingy."

Beratinsky suffered himself to be led away, and together the two walked up toward Oxford Street. Beratinsky was silent, and even surly ; Reitzei garrulous and self-satisfied.

"Yes, I repeat it ; a good night's work. For the thing had to be done ; there were the Council's orders ; and who so appropriate as the Englishman ? Had it been you or J, Beratinsky, or Lind, how could any one of us have been spared ? No doubt the Englishman would have been glad to have Lind's place, and Lind's daughter, too : however, that is all settled now, and very well done. I say it was very well done on the part of Lind. And what did you think of my part, friend Beratinsky ?"

"I think you made a fool of yourself, friend Reitzei," said the other, abruptly.

Reitzei was a vain young man, and he had been fishing for praise.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, angrily.

"What I mean I say," replied the other, with something very like cool contempt. "I say you made a fool of yourself. When a man is drunk, he does his best to appear sober ; you, being sober, tried to appear drunk, and made a fool of yourself."

"My friend Beratinsky," said the younger man, hotly, "you have a right to your own opinion—every man has that : but

you should take care not to make an ass of yourself by expressing it. Do not speak of things you know nothing about—that is my advice to you.”

Beratsky did not answer; and the two walked on in silence until they reached the *Verein*, and entered the long, resounding hall, which was nearly empty. But the few members who remained were making up for their paucity of numbers by their mirth and noise. As Beratsky and his companion took their seats at the upper end of the table the chairman struck his hammer violently, and commanded silence.

“*Silentium, meine Herren!*” he thundered out. “I have a secret to communicate. A great honor has been done one of our members, and even his overwhelming modesty permits it to be known at last. Our good friend Josef Hempel has been appointed Hof-maler to the Grand-duke of ——. I call in you to drink his health and the Grand-duke’s too!”

Then there was a quick filling of glasses; a general uprising; cries of “Hempel! Hempel!” “The Duke!” followed by a resounding chorus—

“Hoch sollen sie leben!
Hoch sollen sie leben!
Dreimal hoch!”—

that echoed away down the empty hall. Then the tumult subsided; and the president, rising, said gravely,

“I now call on our good friend Hempel to reply to the toast, and to give us a few remarks on the condition of art in the Grand Duchy of —, with some observations and reflections on the altered position of the Duchy since the unification of our Fatherland.”

In answer to this summons there rose to his feet a short old gentleman, with a remarkably fresh complexion, silvery-white hair, and merry blue eyes that peered through gold-rimmed spectacles. He was all smiles and blushes; and the longer they cheered the more did he smile and blush.

“Gentlemen,” he said; and this was the signal for further cheering; “Gentlemen,” said the blushing orator, at length, “our friend is at his old tricks. I cannot make a speech to you—except this: I ask you to drink a glass of champagne with me. Kellner—Champagner!”

And he incontinently dropped into his seat again, having forgotten altogether to acknowledge the compliment paid to himself and the Grand-duke.

However, this was like the letting in of water; for no

sooner had the two or three bottles ordered by Herr Hempel been exhausted than one after another of his companions seemed to consider it was their turn now, and loud-shouted orders were continually being administered to the busy waiter. Wine flowed and sparkled; cigars were freely exchanged; the volume of conversation rose in tone, for all were speaking at once; the din became fast and furious.

In the midst of all this Reitzei alone sat apart and silent. Ever since coming into the room the attention of Beratinsky had been monopolized by his neighbor, who had just come back from a great artistic *fête* in some German town, and who, dressed as the Emperor Barbarossa, and followed by his knights, had ridden up the big staircase into the Town-hall. The festivities had lasted for a fortnight; the Staatsweinkeller had furnished liberal supplies; the Princess Adelheid had been present at the crowning ceremony. Then he had brought with him sketches of the various costumes, and so forth. Perhaps it was inadvertently that Beratinsky so grossly neglected his guest.

The susceptible vanity of Reitzei had been deeply wounded before he entered, but now the cup of his wrath was filled to overflowing. The more champagne he drank—and there was plenty coming and going—the more sullen he became. For the rest, he had forgotten the circumstance that he had already drunk two glasses of brandy before his arrival, and that he had eaten nothing since mid-day.

At length Beratinsky turned to him.

“Will you have a cigar, Reitzei?”

Reitzei's first impulse was to refuse to speak; but his wrongs forced him. He said, coldly,

“No, thanks; I have already been offered a cigar by the gentleman next me. Perhaps you will kindly tell me how one, being sober, had any need to pretend to be sober?”

Beratinsky stared at him.

“Oh, you are thinking about that yet, are you?” he said, indifferently; and at this moment, as his neighbor called his attention to some further sketches, he again turned away.

But now the souls of the sons of the Fatherland, warmed with wine, began to think of home and love and patriotism, and longed for some more melodious utterances than this continuous guttural clatter. Silence was commanded. A handsome young fellow, slim and dark, clearly a Jew, ascended the platform, and sat down at the piano; the bashful Hempel, still blushing and laughing, was induced to follow; together they sung, amidst comparative silence, a duet of Mendels-

sohn's, set for tenor and barytone, and sung it very well indeed. There was great applause, but Hempel insisted on retiring. Left to himself, the young man with the handsome profile and the finely-set head played a few bars of prelude, and then, in a remarkably clear and resonant voice, sung Braga's mystical and tender serenade, the "*Legende Valaque*," amidst a silence now quite secured. But what was this one voice or that to all the passion of music demanding utterance? Soon there was a call to the young gentleman to play an accompaniment; and a huge black-a-vised Hessian, still sitting at the table, held up his brimming glass, and began, in a voice like a hundred kettle-drums,

"Ich nehm' mein Glaschen in die Hand :"

then came the universal shout of the chorus, ringing to the roof,

"Vive la Compagneia !"

Again the raucous voice bawled aloud,

"Und fahr' damit in's Unterland :"

and again the thunder of the chorus, this time prolonged, with much beating of time on the table, and jangling of wine-glasses,

"Vive la Compagneia !

Vive la, vive la, vive la, va ! vive la, vive la, hopsasa !

Vive la Compagneia !"

And so on to the end, the chorus becoming stormier and more thunderous than ever; then, when peace had been restored, there was a general rising, though here and there a final glass was drunk with "stosst an ! setzt an ! fertig ! los !" and its attendant ceremonies. The meeting had broken up by common consent; there was a shuffling of footsteps, and some disjointed talking and calling down the empty hall, were the lights were already being put out.

Reitzei had set silent during all this chorus-singing, though ordinarily, being an excitable person, and indeed rather proud of his voice, he was ready to roar with any one; and in silence, too, he walked away with Beratinsky, who either was or appeared to be quite unconscious of his companion's state of mind. At length Reitzei stopped short—Oxford Street at this time of the morning was perfectly silent—and said,

"Beratinsky, I have a word to say to you."

"Very well," said the other, though he seemed surprised.

"I may tell you your manners are none of the best."

Beratsinsky looked at him.

"Nor your temper," said he, "one would think. Do you still go back to what I said about your piece of acting? You are a child, Reitzei."

"I do not care about that," said Reitzei, contemptuously, though he was not speaking the truth: his self-satisfaction had been grievously hurt. "You put too great a value on your opinion, Beratsinsky; it is not everything that you know about: we will let that pass. But when one goes into a society as a guest, one expects to be treated as a guest. No matter; I was among my own countrymen: I was well enough entertained."

"It appears so," said Beratsinsky, with a sneer; "I should say too well. My dear friend Reitzei, I am afraid you have been having a little too much champagne."

"It was none that you paid for, at all events," was the quick retort. "No matter; I was among my own countrymen: they are civil; they are not niggardly."

"They can afford to spend," said the other, laughing sardonically, "out of the plunder they take from others."

"They have fought for what they have," the other said, hotly. "Your countrymen—what have they ever done? Have they fought? No; they have conspired, and then run away."

But Beratsinsky was much too cool-blooded a man to get into a quarrel of this kind; besides, he noticed that Reitzei's speech was occasionally a little thick.

"I would advise you to go home and get to bed, friend Reitzei," said he.

"Not until I have said something to you, Mr Beratsinsky," said the other with mock politeness. "I have this to say, that your ways of late have been a little too uncivil; you have been just rather too insolent, my good friend. Now I tell you frankly it does not do for one in your position to be uncivil and to make enemies."

"For one in my position!" Beratsinsky repeated, in a tone of raillery.

"You think it is a joke, then, what happened to-night?"

"Oh, that is what you mean; but if that is my position, what other is yours, friend Reitzei?"

"You pretend not to know. I will tell you: that was got up between you and Lind; I had nothing to do with it."

"Ho ! ho !"

"You may laugh ; but take care you do not laugh the other way," said the younger man, who had worked himself into a fury, and was all the madder on account of the cynical indifference of his antagonist. "I tell you I had nothing to do with it ; it was your scheme and Lind's ; I did as I was bid. I tell you I could make this very plain if—"

He hesitated.

"Well—if what ?" Beratinsky said, calmly.

"You know very well. I say you are not in a position to insult people and make enemies. You are a very clever man in your own estimation, my friend Beratinsky ; but I would give you the advice to be a little more civil."

Beratinsky regarded him for a second in silence.

"I scarcely know whether it is worth while to point out certain things to you, friend Reitzei, or whether to leave you to go home and sleep off your anger."

"My anger, as you call it, is not a thing of the moment. Oh, I assure you it has nothing to do with the champagne I have just drunk, and which was not paid for by you, thank God ! No ; my anger—my wish to have you alter your manner a little—has been growing for some time ; but it is of late, my dear Beratinsky, that you have become more unbearable than ever."

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Reitzei ; I at least am not going to stand in the streets talking nonsense at two in the morning. Good-night !"

He stepped from the pavement on to the street, to cross.

"Stop !" said Reitzei, seizing his arm with both hands.

Beratinsky shook him off violently, and turned. There might have been a blow ; but Reitzei, who was a coward, shrunk back.

Beratinsky advanced.

"Look here, Reitzei," he said, in a low voice, "I think you are sober enough to understand this. You were throwing out vague threats about what you might do or might not do ; that means that you think you could go and tell something about the proceedings of to-night : you are a fool !"

"Very well—very well."

"Perhaps you do not remember, for example, Clause I., the very first clause in the Obligations binding on Officers of the Second Degree ; you do not remember that, perhaps ?" He was now talking in a quietly contemptuous way ; the little spasm of anger that had disturbed him when Reitzei put his hands on his arm had immediately passed away. "The

punishment for any one revealing, for any reason or purpose whatever, what has been done, or is about to be done by orders of the Council, or by any one acting under these orders—you remember the rest, my friend?—the punishment is death! My good Reitzei, do not deprive me of the pleasure of your companionship; and do not imagine that you can force people to be polite to you by threats; that is not the way at all. Go home and sleep away your anger; and do not imagine that you have any advantage in your position, or that you are less responsible for what has been done than any one."

"I am not so sure about that," said Reitzei, sullenly.

"In the morning you will be sure," said the other, compassionately, as if he were talking to a child.

He held out his hand.

"Come, friend Reitzei," said he, with a sort of pitying kindness, "you will find in the morning it will be all right. What happened to-night was well arranged, and well executed; everybody must be satisfied. And if you were a little too exuberant in your protestations, a little too anxious to accept the work yourself, and rather too demonstrative with your tremblings and your professions of courage and your clutching at the bottle: what then? Every one is not a born actor. Every one must make a mistake sometimes. But you won't take my hand?"

"Oh, Mr. Beratinsky," said the other, with profound sarcasm, "how could you expect it? Take the hand of one so wise as you, so great as you, such a logician as you are? It would be too much honor; but if you will allow me I will bid you good-night."

He turned abruptly and left. Beratinsky stood for a moment or so looking after him; then he burst into a fit of laughter that sounded along the empty street. Reitzei heard the laughing behind him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

TWICE-TOLD TALE.

WHEN the door had closed on George Brand, Natalie stood for a second or two uncertain, to collect her bewildered thoughts. She heard his footsteps growing fainter and fainter; the world seemed to sway around her; life itself to

be slipping away. Then suddenly she turned, and seized her mother by both her hands.

"Child, child, what is the matter?" the mother cried, terrified by the piteous eyes and white lips.

"Ah, you could not have guessed," the girl said, wildly, "you could not have guessed from his manner what he has told me, could you? He is not one to say much; he is not one to complain. But he is about to lose his life, mother—to lose his life! and it is I who have led him to this; it is I who have killed him!"

"Natalie," the mother exclaimed, turning rather pale, "you don't know what you are saying."

"But it is true; do not you understand, mother?" the girl said, despairingly. "The Society has given him some duty to do—now, at once—and it will cost him his life. Oh, do you think he complains?—no, he is not one to complain. He says it is nothing; he has pledged himself; he will obey; and what is the value of his one single life? That is the way he talks, mother. And the parting between him and me—that is so near, so near now—what is that, when there are thousands and thousands of such every time that war is declared? I am to make light of it, mother; I am to think it is nothing at all—that he should be going away to die!"

She had been talking quite wildly, almost incoherently; she had not observed that her mother had grown paler than ever; nor had she heard the half-murmured exclamation of the elder woman,

"No, no—not the story twice told; he could not do that!"

Then, with an unusual firmness and decision, she led her daughter to the easy-chair, and made her sit down.

"Natalie," she said, in earnest and grave tones, without any excitement whatever, "you have told me your father was very much against you marrying Mr. Brand."

There was no answer. The girl sitting there could only think of that terrible thing facing her in the immediate future.

"Natalie," said her mother, firmly, "I wish you to listen. You said your father was opposed to your marriage—that he would not hear of it; and you remember telling me how Mr. Brand had refused to hand over his property to the Society; and you talked of going to America if Mr. Brand were sent? Natalie, this is your father's doing!"

She looked up quickly, not understanding. The elder woman flushed slightly, but continued in clear and even tones.

"Perhaps I am wrong, Natalushka; perhaps I should not

teach you to suspect your father. But that is how I see it—this is what I believe—that Mr. Brand, if what you say is true, is to be sacrificed, not in the interests of the Society, but because your father is determined to get him out of the way.”

“Oh, mother, it is impossible ! How could any one be so cruel ? ”

“It would be strange if the story were to be twice told,” the mother said, absently. Then she took a stool beside her daughter, and sat down beside her, and took one of her hands in both hers. It was a reversal of their ordinary position.

“Listen, Natalie ; I am going to tell you a story,” she said, with a curious resignation and sadness in her voice. “I had thought it might be unnecessary to tell it to you ; when Mr. Brand spoke of it, I said no. But you will judge for yourself, and it will distract your mind for a little. You must think of a young girl something like yourself, Natalushka ; not so handsome as you are, but a little pretty, and with many friends. Oh yes, many friends ; for at that time the family were in very brilliant society and had large estates : alas ! the estates were soon all lost in politics, and all that remained to the family was their name and some tales of what they had done. Well, this young lady, among all her friends, had one or two sweethearts, as was natural—for there were a great coming and going then, before the troubles broke out, and many visitors at the house—only every one thought she ought to marry her cousin Konrad, for they had been brought up together, and this cousin Konrad was a good-looking young man, and amiable, and her parents would have approved. Are you sure you are listening to my story, Natalushka ? ”

“Oh yes, mother,” she said, in a low voice ; “I think I understand.”

“Well,” continued the mother, with rather a sad smile, “you know a girl does not always choose the one whom her friends choose for her. Among the two or three sweethearts—that is, those who wished to be sweethearts, do you understand, Natalushka ?—there was one who was more audacious, perhaps, more persistent than the others ; and then he was a man of great ambition, and of strong political views ; and the young lady I was telling you about, Natalushka, had been brought up to the political atmosphere, and had opinions also. She believed this man was capable of doing great things ; and her friends not objecting, she, after a few years

of waiting, owing to the troubles of political matters, married him."

She was silent for a moment or two.

"Yes, they were married," she continued, with a sigh, "and for a time every thing was happy, though the political affairs were so untoward, and cost much suffering and danger. The young wife only admired her husband's determined will, his audacity, his ambition after leadership and power. But in the midst of all this, as time went on, he began to grow jealous of the cousin Konrad; and Konrad, though he was a light-hearted young fellow, and meaning no harm whatever, resented being forbidden to see his cousin. He refused to cease visiting the house, though the young wife begged him to do so. He was very proud and self-willed, you must know, Natalushka. Well, the husband did not say much, but he was morose, and once or twice he said to his wife, 'It is not your fault that your cousin is impertinent; but let him take care.' Then one day an old friend of his wife's father came to her, and said, 'Do you know what has happened? You are not likely to see your cousin Konrad again. The Russian General——, whom we bribed with twenty-four thousand rubles to give us ten passports for crossing the frontier, now refuses to give them, and Konrad has been sent to kill him, as a warning to the others; he will be taken, and hanged.' I forgot to tell you, Natalushka, that the girl I am speaking of was in all the secrets of the association which had been started. You are more fortunate; you know nothing."

The interest of the listener had now been thoroughly aroused. She had turned toward her mother, and had put her remaining hand over hers.

"Well, this friend hinted something more; he hinted that it was the husband of this young wife who had sent Konrad on this mission, and that the means employed had not been quite fair."

"Mother, what do you mean?" Natalie said, breathlessly.

"I am telling you a story that really happened, Natalushka," said the mother, calmly, and with the same pathetic touch in her voice. "Then the young wife, without consideration—so anxious was she to save the life of her cousin—went straight to the highest authorities of the association, and appealed to them. The influence of her family aided her. She was listened to; there was an examination; what the friend had hinted was found to be true; the commission was annulled; Konrad was given his liberty!"

"Yes, yes!" said Natalie, eagerly.

"But listen, Natalushka; I said I would tell you the whole story; it has been kept from you for many a year. When it was found that the husband had made use of the machinery of the association for his own ends—which, it appears, was a great crime in their eyes—he was degraded, and forbidden all hope of joining the Council, the ruling body. He was in a terrible rage, for he was mad with ambition. He drove the wife from his house—rather, he left the house himself—and he took away with him their only child, a little girl scarcely two years old; and he threatened the mother with the most terrible penalties if ever again she should speak to her own child! Natalushka, do you understand me? Do you wonder that my face is worn with grief? For sixteen years that mother, who loved her daughter better than anything in the world, was not permitted to speak to her, could only regard her from a distance, and not tell her how she loved her."

The girl uttered a cry of compassion, and wound her arms round her mother's neck.

"Oh, the cruelty of it!—the cruelty of it, mother! But why did you not come to me? Do you think I would not have left everything to go with you—you, alone and suffering?"

For a time the mother could not answer, so deep were her sobs.

"Natalushka," she said at length, in a broken voice, "no fear of any danger threatening myself would have kept me from you; be sure of that. But there was something else. My father had become compromised—the Austrians said it was assassination; it was not!" For a second some hot blood mounted to her cheeks. "I say it was a fair duel, and your grandfather himself was nearly killed; but he escaped, and got into hiding among some faithful friends—poor people, who had known our family in better times. The Government did what they could to arrest him; he was expressly exempted from the amnesty, this old man, who was wounded, who was incapable of movement almost, whom every one expected to die from day to day, and a word would have betrayed him and destroyed him. Can you wonder, Natalushka, with that threat hanging over me—that menace that the moment I spoke to you meant that my father would be delivered to his enemies—that I said 'No, not yet will I speak to my little daughter; I cannot sacrifice my father's life even to the affection of a mother! But soon, when I

have given him such care and solace as he has the right to demand from me, then I will set out to see my beautiful child—not with baskets of flowers, haunting the door-steps—not with a little trinket, to drop in her lap, and perhaps set her mind thinking—no, but with open arms and open heart, to see if she is not afraid to call me mother.’ ”

“ Poor mother, how you must have suffered,” the girl murmured, holding her close to her bosom. “ But with your powerful friends—those to whom you appealed to before—why did you not go to them, and get safety from the terrible threat hanging over you? Could they not protect him, my grandfather, as they saved your cousin Konrad? ”

“ Alas, child, your grandfather never belonged to the association! Of what use was he to them—a sufferer expecting each day to be his last, and not daring to move beyond the door of the peasant’s cottage that sheltered him? many a time he used to say to me, ‘ Natalie, go to your child. I am already dead; what matters it whether they take me or not? You have watched the old tree fade leaf by leaf; it is only the stump that cumpers the ground. Go to your child; if they try to drag me from here, the first mile will be the end; and what better can one wish for? ’ But no; I could not do that.”

Natalie had been thinking deeply; she raised her head, and regarded her mother with a calm, strange look.

“ Mother,” she said, slowly, “ I do not think I will ever enter my father’s house again.”

The elder woman heard this declaration without either surprise or joy. She said, simply,

“ Do not judge rashly or harshly, Natalushka. Why have I refrained until now from telling you the story but that I thought it better—I thought you would be happier if you continued to respect and love your father. Then consider what excuses may be made for him—”

“ None! ” the girl said, vehemently. “ To keep you suffering for sixteen years away from your only child, and with the knowledge that at any moment a word on his part might lead out your father to a cruel death—oh, mother mother, you may ask me to forgive, but not to excuse! ”

“ Ambition—the desire for influence and leadership—is his very life,” the mother said, calmly. “ He cares more for that than anything in the world—wife, child, anything, he would sacrifice to it. But now, child,” she said, with a concerned look, “ can you understand why I have told you the story? ”

Natalie looked up bewildered. For a time the interest of

She turned to her mother.

"Now, mother, it is good-bye for I do not know how long."

"Oh no, it is not, child," said the other, trembling, and yet smiling in spite of all her fears. "If you are going to travel, you must have a courier. I will be your courier, Natalushka."

"Will you come with me, mother?" she cried, with a happy light leaping to her eyes. "Come, then—we will give courage to each other, you and I, shall we not? Ah, dear mother, you have told me your story only in time; but we will go quickly now—you and I together!"

CHAPTER XLV.

SOUTHWARD.

AFTER so much violent emotion the rapid and eager preparations for travel proved a useful distraction. There was no time to lose; and Natalie very speedily found that it was she herself who must undertake the duties of a courier, her mother being far too anxious and alarmed. Once or twice, indeed, the girl, regarding the worn, sad face, almost repented of having accepted that impulsive offer, and would have proposed to start alone. But she knew that, left in solitude, the poor distressed mother would only torture herself with imaginary fears. As for herself, she had no fear; her heart was too full to have any room for fear. And yet her hand trembled a little as she sat down to write these two messages of farewell. The first ran thus:

"MY FATHER,—To-day, for the first time, I have heard my mother's story from herself. I have looked into her eyes; I know she speaks the truth. You will not wonder then that I leave your house—that I go with her; there must be some one to try to console her for all she has suffered, and I am her daughter. I thank you for many years of kindness, and pray God to bless you.
NATALIE."

The next was easier to write.

"DEAREST,—My mother and I leave England to-night. Do not ask why we go, or why I have not sent for you to come and say good-bye. We shall be away perhaps only a

few days ; in any case you must not go until we return. Do not forget that I must see you again. ' NATALIE."

She felt happier when she had written these two notes. She rose from the table and went over to her mother.

"Now, mother, tell me how much money you have," she said, with a highly practical air. "What, have I startled you, poor little mother? I believe your head is full of all kinds of strange forebodings; and yet they used to say that the Berezhovys were all of them very courageous."

"Natalushka, you do not know what danger you are rushing into," the mother said, absently.

"I again ask you, mother, a simple question: how much money have you?"

"I? I have thirty pounds or thereabout, Natalie; that is my capital, as it were; but next month my cousins will send me—"

"Never mind about next month, mother dear. You must let me rob you of all your thirty pounds; and, just to make sure, I will go and borrow ten pounds more from Madame Potecki. Madame is not so very poor; she has savings; she would give me every farthing if I asked her. And do you think, little mother, if we come back successful—do you think there will be a great difficulty about paying back the loan to Madame Potecki?"

She was quite gay, to give her mother courage; and she refused to leave her alone, a prey to these gloomy forebodings. She carried her off with her in the cab to Curzon Street, and left her in the cab while she entered the house with Anneli. Anneli cried a little when she was receiving her mistress's last instructions.

"Am I never to see you again, Fraulein?" she sobbed. "Are you never coming back to the house any more?"

"Of course you will see me again, you foolish girl, even if I do not come back here. Now you will be careful, Anneli, to have the wine a little warmed before dinner, and see that your master's slippers are in the study by the fire; and the coffee—you must make the coffee yourself, Anneli—"

"Oh yes, indeed, Fraulein, I will make the coffee," said Anneli, with a fresh flowing of tears. "But—but may not I go with you, Fraulein?—if you are not coming back here any more, why may I not go with you? I am not anxious for wages, Fraulein—I do not want any wages at all; but if you will take me with you—"

"Now, do not be foolish, Anneli. Have you not a whole

house to look after? There, take these keys; you will have to show that you can be a good house-mistress, and sensible, and not childish."

At the door she shook hands with the sobbing maid, and bade her a cheerful good-bye. Then she got into the cab and drove away to Madame Potecki's lodgings. Finally, by dexterous management, she succeeded in getting her mother and herself to Charing Cross Station in time to catch the afternoon express to Dover.

It is probable that, now the first excitement of setting out was over, and the two women-folk left to themselves in the solitude of a compartment, Natalie might have begun to reflect with some tremor of the heart on the very vagueness of the task she had undertaken. But she was not permitted to do so. The necessity of driving away her mother's forebodings prevented her indulging in any of her own. She was forced to be careless, cheerful, matter-of-fact.

"Natalushka," the mother said, holding her daughter's hand, "you have been brought up in ignorance. You know only the romantic, the beautiful side of what is going on; you do not know what these men are ready to do—what has been done—to secure the success of their schemes. And for you, a girl, to interfere, it is madness, Natalushka. They will laugh at you, perhaps; perhaps it may be worse; they may resent your interference, and ask who has betrayed their secrets."

"Are they so very terrible, then?" said the girl, with a smile, "when Lord Evelyn—ah, you do not know him yet, mother; but he is as gentle as a woman—when he is their friend; and when Mr. Brand is full of admiration for what they are doing; and when Calabressa— Now, mother, is Calabressa likely to harm any one? And it was Calabressa himself who said to me, 'Little daughter, if ever you are in great trouble, go to Naples. You will find friends there.' No, mother, it is no use your trying to frighten me. No; let us talk about something sensible; for example, which way is the wind?"

"How can I tell, Natalushka?"

The girl laughed—rather a forced laugh, perhaps; she could not altogether shake off the consciousness of the peril that surrounded her lover.

"Why, mother, you are a pretty courier! You are about to cross the Channel, and you do not know which way the wind is, or whether the sea is rough, or anything. Now I will tell you; it is I who am the courier. The wind is north-

east ; the sea was quite smooth yesterday evening ; I think we shall have a comfortable passage. And do you know why I have brought you away by this train ? Don't you know that I shall get you down to Dover in time to give you something nice for dinner ; then, if the sea is quite smooth, we go on board before the people come ; then we cross over to Calais and go to a hotel there ; then you get a good, long, sound sleep, you little mother, and the next day—that is to-morrow—about noon, I think, we go easily on to Paris. What do you think of that, now ? ”

“ Whatever you do will be right, Natalushka ; you know I have never before had a daughter to look after me. ”

Natalie's programme was fulfilled to the letter, and with good fortune. They dined in the hotel, had some tea, and then went down through the dark clear night to the packet. The sea was like a mill-pond ; there was just sufficient motion of the water to make the reflections of the stars quiver in the dark. The two women sat together on deck ; and as the steamer gradually took them away from the lights of the English coast, Natalie sung to her mother, in a low voice, some verses of an old Magyar song, which were scarcely audible amidst the rush of water and the throbbing of the paddles.

Next day the long and tedious railway journey began ; and here again Natalie acted as the most indefatigable and accomplished of couriers.

“ How do you manage it, Natalushka ? ” said the mother, as she got into the *coupe*, to this tall and handsome young lady who was standing outside, and on whom everybody seemed to wait. “ You get everything you want, and without trouble. ”

“ It is only practice, with a little patience, ” she said, simply, as she opened her flask of white-rose scent and handed it up to her mother.

Necessarily, it was rail all the way for these two travellers. Not for them the joyous assembling on the Mediterranean shore, where Nice lies basking in the sun like a pink surf thrown up by the waves. Not for them the packing of the great carriage, and the swinging away of the four horses with their jingling bells, and the slow climbing of the Cornice, the road twisting up the face of the gray mountains, through perpetual lemon-groves, with far below the ribbed blue sea. Not for them the leisurely trotting all day long through the luxuriant beauty of the Riviera—the sun hot on the ruddy cliffs of granite, and on the terraces of figs and vines and spreading

palms ; nor the rattling through the narrow streets of the old walled towns, with the scarlet-capped men and swarthy-visaged women shrinking into the door-ways as the horses clatter by ; nor the quiet evenings in the hotel garden, with the moon rising over the murmuring sea, and the air sweet with the perfumes of the south. No. They climbed a mountain, it is true, but it was behind an engine ; they beheld the Mont Cenis snows, but it was from the window of a railway-carriage. Then they passed through the black, resounding tunnel, with, after a time, its sudden glares of light ; finally the world seemed to open around them ; they looked down upon Italy.

"Many a one has died for you, and been glad," said the girl, almost to herself, as she gazed abroad on the great valleys, with here and there a peak crowned with a castle or a convent, with the vine-terraced hills showing now and again a few white dots of houses, and beyond and above all these the far blue mountains, with their sharp line of snow.

Then they descended, and passed through the luxuriant yellow plains—the sunset blazing on the rows of willows and on the square farm-houses with their gaudy picture over the arched gateway ; while always in the background rose the dark masses of the mountains, solemn and distant, beyond the golden glow of the fields. They reached Turin at dusk, both of them very tired.

So far scarcely anything had been said about the object of their journey, though they could have talked in safety even in railway-carriages, as they spoke to each other in Magyar. But Natalie refused to listen to any dissuading counsel ; when her mother began, she would say, "Dear little mother, will you have some white rose for your forehead and your fingers ?"

From Turin they had to start again early in the morning. They had by this time grown quite accustomed to the plod, plodding of the train ; it seemed almost one of the normal and necessary conditions of life. They went down by Genoa, Spezia, Pisa, Sienna, and Rome, making the shortest possible pauses.

One night the windows of a sitting-room in a hotel at the western end of Naples were opened, and a young girl stepped out on to the high balcony, a light shawl thrown over her head and shoulders. It was a beautiful night ; the air sweet and still ; the moonlight shining over the scarcely stirring waters of the bay. Before her rose the vast bulk of the Castello dell' Ovo, a huge mass of black shadow against the silvery sea and the lambent sky ; then far away throbbed the

dull orange lights of the city ; and beyond these, again, Vesuvius towered into the clear darkness, with a line of sharp, intense crimson marking its summit. Through the perfect silence she could hear the sound of the oars of a boat, itself unseen ; and over the whispering waters came some faint and distant refrain, "*Addio ! addio !*" At length even these sounds ceased, and she was alone in the still, murmuring beautiful night.

She looked across to the great city. Who were her unknown friends there ? What mighty power was she about to invoke on the morrow ? There was no need for her to consult the card that Calabressa had given her ; again and again, in the night-time, when her mother lay asleep, she had studied it, and wondered whether it would prove the talisman the giver had called it. She looked at this great city beside the sea, and only knew that it was beautiful in the moonlight ; she had no fear of anything that it contained. And then she thought of another city, far away in the colder north, and she wondered if a certain window were open there, overlooking the river and the gas-lamp and the bridges, and whether there was one there thinking of her. Could not the night-wind carry the speech and desire of her heart ?—"Good-night, good-night. . . . Love knows no fear. . . . Not yet is our life forever broken for us."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BEECHES.

ON the same night Lord Evelyn was in Brand's rooms, arguing, expostulating, entreating, all to no purpose. He was astounded at the calmness with which this man appeared to accept the terrible task imposed on him, and at the stoical indifference with which he looked forward to the almost certain sacrifice of his own life.

"You have become a fanatic of fanatics !" he exclaimed, indignantly.

George Brand was staring out of the windows into the dark night, somewhat absently.

"I suppose," he answered, "all the great things that have been done in the world have been founded in fanaticism. All that I can hope for now is that this particular act of the Coun-

cil may have the good effect they hope from it. They ought to know. They see the sort of people with whom they have to deal. I should have thought, with Lind, that it was unwise—that it would shock, or even terrify; but my opinion is neither here nor there. Further talking is of no use, Evelyn; the thing is settled; what I have to consider now, as regards myself, is how I can best benefit a few people whom I am interested in, and you can help me in that.”

“But I appeal to yourself—to your conscience!” Lord Evelyn cried, almost in despair. “You cannot shift the responsibility to them. You are answerable for your own actions. I say you are sacrificing your conscience to your pride. You are saying to yourself, ‘Do these foreigners think that I am afraid?’”

“I am not thinking of myself at all,” said Brand, simply; “that is all over. When I swore to give myself to this Society—to obey the commands of the Council—then my responsibility ceased. What I have to do is to be faithful to my oath, and to the promise I have made.” Almost unconsciously he glanced at the ring that Natalie had given him. “You would not have me skulk back like a coward? You would not have me ‘play and not pay?’ What I have undertaken to do I will do.”

Presently he added,

“There is something you could do, Evelyn. Don’t let us talk further of myself: I said before, if a single man drops out of the ranks, what matter?—the army marches on. And what has been concerning me of late is the effect that this act of the Council may have on our thousands of friends throughout this country. Now, Evelyn, when—when the affair comes off, I think you would do a great deal of good by pointing out in the papers what a scoundrel this man Zaccatelli was; how he had merited his punishment, and how it might seem justifiable to the people over there that one should take the law into one’s own hands in such an exceptional case. You might do that, Evelyn, for the sake of the Society. The people over here don’t know what a ruffian he is, and how he is beyond the ordinary reach of the law, or how the poor people have groaned under his iniquities. Don’t seek to justify me; I shall be beyond the reach of excuse or execration by that time; but you might break the shock, don’t you see?—you might explain a little—you might intimate to our friends who have joined us here that they had not joined any kind of Camorra association. That troubles me more than anything. I confess to you that I have got quite reconciled to the af-

fair, as far as any sacrifice on my own part is concerned. That bitterness is over ; I can even think of Natalie."

The last words were spoken slowly, and in a low voice ; his eyes were fixed on the night-world outside. What could his friend say ? They talked late into the night : but all his remonstrances and prayers were of no avail as against this clear resolve.

"What is the use of discussion ?" was the placid answer. "What would you have me do ?—break my oaths—put aside my sacred promise made to Natalie, and give up the Society altogether ? My good fellow, let us talk of something less impossible."

And indeed, though he deprecated discussion on this point, he was anxious to talk. The fact was that of late he had come to fear sleep, as the look of his eyes testified. In the daytime, or as long as he could sit up with a companion, he could force himself to think only of the immediate and practical demands of the hour ; vain regrets over what might have been—and even occasional uneasy searchings of conscience—he could by an effort of will ignore. He had accepted his fate ; he had schooled himself to look forward to it without fear ; henceforth there was to be no indecision, no murmur of complaint. But in the night-time—in dreams—the natural craving for life asserted itself ; it seemed so sad to bid good-bye forever to those whom he had known and loved ; and mostly always it was Natalie herself who stood there, regarding him with streaming eyes, and wringing her hands, and sobbing to him farewell. The morning light, or the first calls in the thoroughfare below, or the shrieking of some railway-whistle on Hungerford Bridge brought an inexpressible relief by banishing these agonizing visions. No matter how soon Waters was astir, he found his master up before him—dressed, and walking up and down the room, or reading some evening newspaper of the previous day. Sometimes Brand occupied himself in getting ready his own breakfast, but he had to explain to Waters that this was not meant as a rebuke—it was merely that, being awake early, he wished for some occupation.

Early on the morning after this last despairing protest on the part of Lord Evelyn, Brand drove up to Paddington Station, on his way to pay a hurried visit to his Buckinghamshire home. Nearly all his affairs had been settled in town ; there remained some arrangements to be made in the country. Lord Evelyn was to have joined him in this excursion, but at the last moment had not put in an appearance ; so Brand

jumped in just as the train was starting, and found himself alone in the carriage.

The bundle of newspapers he had with him did not seem to interest him much. He was more than ever puzzled to account for the continued silence of Natalie. Each morning he had been confidently expecting to hear from her—to have some explanation of her sudden departure—but as the days went by, and no message of any sort arrived, his wonder became merged in anxiety. It seemed so strange that she should thus absent herself, when she had been counting on each day on which she might see him as if it were some gracious gift from Heaven.

All that he was certain of in the matter was that Lind knew no more than himself as to where Natalie had gone. One afternoon, going out from his rooms into Buckingham Street, he caught sight of Beratinsky loitering about farther up the little thoroughfare, about the corner of John Street. Beratinsky's back was turned to him, and so he took advantage of the moment to open the gate, for which he had a private key, leading down to the old York Gate; from thence he made his way round by Villiers Street, whence he could get a better view of the little black-a-vised Pole's proceedings.

He speedily convinced himself that Beratinsky, though occasionally he walked along in the direction of Adam Street, and though sometimes he would leisurely stroll up to the Strand, was in reality keeping an eye on Buckingham Street; and he had not the least doubt that he himself was the object of this surveillance. He laughed to himself. Had these wise people in Lisle Street, then, discovering that Natalie's mother was in London, arrived at the conclusion that she and her daughter had taken refuge in so very open a place of shelter? When Beratinsky was least expecting any such encounter, Brand went up and tapped him on the shoulder.

"How do you do, Mr. Beratinsky?" said he, when the other wheeled round. "This is not the most agreeable place for a stroll. Why do you not go down to the Embankment Gardens?"

Beratinsky was angry and confused, but did not quite lose his self-command.

"I am waiting for some one," he said, curtly.

"Or to find out about some one? Well, I will save you some trouble. Lind wishes to know where his wife and daughter are, I imagine."

"Is that unnatural?"

"I suppose not. I heard he had been down to Hans Place, where Madame Lind was staying."

"You knew, then?" the other said, quickly.

"Oh yes, I knew. Now, if you will be frank with me, I may be of some assistance to you. Lind does not know where his wife and daughter are?"

"You know he does not."

"And you—perhaps you fancied that one or other might be sending a message to me—might call, perhaps—or even that I might have got them rooms for the time being?"

The Englishman's penetrating gray eyes were difficult to avoid.

"You appear to know a good deal, Mr. Brand," Beratinsky said, somewhat sulkily. "Perhaps you can tell me where they are now?"

"I can tell you where they are not, and that is in London."

The other looked surprised, then suspicious.

"Oh, believe me or not, as you please: I only wish to save you trouble. I tell you that, to the best of my belief, Miss Lind and her mother are not in London, nor in this country even."

"How do you know?"

"Pardon me; you are going too far. I only tell you what I believe. In return, as I have saved you some trouble, I shall expect you to let me know if you hear anything about them. Is that too much to ask?"

"Then you really don't know where they are?" Beratinsky said, with a quick glance.

"I do not; but they have left London—that I know."

"I am very much obliged to you," said the other, more humbly. "I wish you good evening, Mr. Brand."

"Stay a moment: Can you tell me what Yacov Kirski's address is? I have something to arrange with him before I leave England."

He took out his note-book, and put down the address that Beratinsky gave him. Then the latter moved away, taking off his hat politely, but not shaking hands.

Brand was amused rather than surprised at this little adventure; but when day after day passed, and no tidings came from Natalie, he grew alarmed. Each morning he was certain there would be a letter; each morning the postman rung the bell below, and Waters would tumble down the stairs at breakneck speed, but not a word from Natalie or her mother.

At the little Buckinghamshire station at which he stopped he found a dog-cart waiting to convey him to Hill Beeches;

and speedily he was driving away through the country he knew so well, now somewhat desolate in the faded tints of the waning of the year ; and perhaps, as he drew near to the red and white house on the hill, he began to reproach himself that he had not made the place more his home. Though the grounds and shrubberies were neat and trim enough, there was a neglected look about the house itself. When he entered, his footsteps rung hollow on the uncarpeted floors. Chintz covered the furniture ; muslin smothered the chandeliers ; everything seemed to be locked up and put away. And this comely woman of sixty or so who came forward to meet him—a smiling, gracious dame, with silvery-white hair, and peach-like cheeks, and the most winning little laugh—was not her first word some hint to the young master that he had been a long time away, and how the neighbors were many a time asking her when a young mistress was coming to the Beeches, to keep the place as it used to be kept in the olden days ?

“ Ah well, sir, you know how the people do talk,” she said, with an apologetic smile. “ And there was Mrs. Diggles, sir, that is at the Checkers, sir, and she was speaking only the other day, as it might be, about the old oak cupboard, that you remember, sir, and she was saying, ‘ Well, I wouldn’t give that cupboard to Mahster Brand, though he offered me twenty pound for it years ago—twenty pound, not a farthing less. My vather he gave me that cupboard when I was married, and ten shillings was what he paid for it ; and then there was twenty-five shillings paid for putting that cupboard to rights. And then the wet day that Mahster Brand was out shooting, and the Checkers that crowded that I had to ask him and the other gentleman to go into my own room, and what does he say but, “ Mrs. Diggles, I will give you twenty pound for that cupboard of yourn, once you knock off the feet and the curly bit on the top.” Law, how the gentle-folk do know about sech things : that was exactly what my vather he paid the twenty-five shillings for. But how could I give him my cupboard for twenty pound when I had promised it to my nephew ? When I’m taken, that cupboard my nephew shall have.’ Well, sir, the people do say that Mrs. Diggles and her nephew have had a quarrel ; and this was what she was saying to me—begging your pardon, sir—only the other day, as it might be ; says she, ‘ Mrs. Alleyne, this is what I will do : when your young mahster brings home a wife to the Beeches, I will make his lady a wedding-present of that cupboard of mine—that I will, if so be as she is not too proud to accept it from one

in my 'umble station. It will be a wedding-present, and the sooner the better,' says she—begging of your pardon, sir."

"It is very kind of her, Mrs. Alleyne. Now let me have the keys, if you please ; I have one or two things to see to, and I will not detain you now."

She handed him the keys and accepted her dismissal gratefully, for she was anxious to get off and see about luncheon. Then Brand proceeded to stroll quietly, and perhaps even sadly, through the empty and resounding rooms that had for him many memories.

It was a rambling, old-fashioned, oddly-built house, that had been added on to by successive generations, according to their needs, without much reference to the original design. It had come into the possession of the Brands of Darlington by marriage: George Brand's grandfather having married a certain Lady Mary Heaton, the last representative of an old and famous family. And these lonely rooms that he now walked through—remarking here and there what prominence had been given by his mother to the many trophies of the chase that he himself had sent home from various parts of the world—were hung chiefly with portraits, whose costumes ranged from the stiff frill and peaked waist of Elizabeth to the low neck and ringleted hair of Victoria. But there was in an inner room which he entered another collection of portraits that seemed to have a peculiar fascination for him—a series of miniatures of various members of the Heaton and Brand families, reaching down even to himself, for the last that was added had been taken when he was a lad, to send to his mother, then lying dangerously ill at Cannes. There was her own portrait, too—that of a delicate-looking woman with large, lustrous, soft eyes and wan cheeks, who had that peculiar tenderness and sweetness of expression that frequently accompanies consumption. He sat looking at these various portraits a long time, wondering now and again what this or that one may have suffered or rejoiced in ; but more than all he lingered over the last, as if to bid those beautiful tender eyes a final farewell.

He was startled by the sound of some vehicle rattling over the gravel outside ; then he heard some one come walking through the echoing rooms. Instantly, he scarcely knew why he shut down the lid of the case in front of him.

"Missed the train by just a second," Lord Evelyn said, coming into the room ; "I am awfully sorry."

"It doesn't matter," Brand answered ; "but I am glad you

have come. I have everything squared up in London, I think ; there only remains to settle a few things down here."

He spoke in quite a matter-of-fact way—so much so that his friend forgot to utter any further and unavailing protest.

"You know I am supposed to be going away abroad for a long time," he continued. "You must take my place, Evelyn, in a sort of way, and I will introduce you to-day to the people you must look after. There is a grandson of my mother's nurse, for example : I promised to do something for him when he completed his apprenticeship ; and two old ladies who have seen better days—they are not supposed to accept any help, but you can make wonderful discoveries about the value of their old china, and carry it off to Bond Street. I will leave you plenty of funds ; before my nephew comes into the place there will be sufficient for him and to spare. But as for yourself, Evelyn, I want you to take some little souvenir—how about this ?"

He went and fetched a curious old silver drinking-cup, set round the lip and down the handle with uncut rubies and sapphires.

"I don't like the notion of the thing at all," Lord Evelyn said, rather gloomily ; but it was not the cup that he was refusing thus ungraciously.

"After a time people will give me up for lost ; and I have left you ample power to give any one you can think of some little present, don't you know, as a memento—whatever strikes your own fancy. I want Natalie to have that Louis XV. table over there—people rather admire the inlaid work on it, and the devices inside are endless. However, we will make out a list of these things afterward. Will you drive me down to the village now ? I want you to see my pensioners."

"All right—if you like," Lord Evelyn said ; though his heart was not in the work.

He walked out of this little room and made his way to the front-door, fancying that Brand would immediately follow. But Brand returned to that room, and opened the case of miniatures. Then he took from his pocket a little parcel, and unrolled it ; it was a portrait of Natalie—a photograph on porcelain, most delicately colored, and surrounded with an antique silver frame. He gazed for a minute or two at the beautiful face, and somehow the eyes seemed sad to him. Then he placed the little portrait—which itself looked like a miniature—next the miniature of his mother, and shut the case and locked it.

"I beg your pardon, Evelyn, for keeping you waiting," he

said, at the front-door. "Will you particularly remember this—that none of the portraits here are to be disturbed on any account whatever?"

CHAPTER XLVII.

AT PORTICI.

NATALIE slept far from soundly the first night after her arrival in Naples; she was glad when the slow, anxious hours, with all their bewildering uncertainties and forebodings, were over. She rose early, and dressed quickly; she threw open the tall French windows to let in the soft silken air from the sea; then she stepped out on the balcony to marvel once more—she who knew Naples well enough—at the shining beauty around her.

It was a morning to give courage to any one; the air was fresh and sweet; she drank deep of the abundant gladness and brightness of the world. The great plain of waters before her shimmered and sparkled in millions of diamonds; with here and there long splashes of sunny green, and here and there long splashes of purple where the sea-weed showed through. The waves sprung white on the projecting walls of the Castello dell' Ovo, and washed in on the shore with a soft continuous murmur; the brown-sailed fishing-boats went by, showing black or red as they happened to be in sunshine or shadow. Then far away beyond the shining sea the island of Capri lay like a blue cloud on the horizon; and far away beyond the now awakening city near her rose Vesuvius, the twin peaks dark under some swathes of cloud, the sunlight touching the lower slopes into a yellowish green, and shining on the pink fringe of villas along the shore. On so fair and bright a morning hope came as natural to her as singing to a bird. The fears of the night were over; she could not be afraid of what such a day should bring forth.

And yet—and yet—from time to time—and just for a second or so—her heart seemed to stand still. And she was so silent and preoccupied at breakfast, that her mother remarked it; and Natalie had to excuse herself by saying that she was a little tired with the travelling. After breakfast she led her mother into the reading-room, and said, in rather an excited way,

"Now, mother, here is a treat for you ; you will get all the English papers here, and all the news."

"You forget, Natalie," said her mother, smiling, "that English papers are not of much use to me."

"Ah, well, the foreign papers," she said, quickly. "You see, mother, I want to go along to a chemist's to get some white rose."

"You should not throw it about the railway carriages so much, Natalushka," the unsuspecting mother said, reprovingly. "You are extravagant."

She did not heed.

"Perhaps they will have it in Naples. Wait until I come back, mother ; I shall not be long."

But it was not white-rose scent that was in her mind as she went rapidly away and got ready to go out ; and it was not in search of any chemist's shop that she made her way to the Via Roma. Why, she had asked herself that morning, as she stood on the balcony, and drank in the sunlight and the sweet air, should she take the poor tired mother with her on this adventure ? If there was danger, she would brave it by herself. She walked quickly—perhaps anxious to make the first plunge.

She had no difficulty in finding the Vico Carlo, though it was one of the narrowest and steepest of the small, narrow, and steep lanes leading off the main thoroughfare into the masses of tall and closely-built houses on the side of the hill. But when she looked up and recognized the little plate bearing the name at the corner, she turned a little pale ; something, she knew not what, was now so near.

And as she turned into this narrow and squalid little alley, it seemed as if her eyes, through some excitement or other, observed the objects around her with a strange intensity. She could remember each and every one of them afterward—the fruit-sellers bawling, and the sellers of acidulated drinks out-roaring them ; the shoemakers already at work at their open stalls ; mules laden with vegetables ; a negro monk, with his black woolly head above the brown hood ; a venerable letter-writer at a small table, spectacles on nose and pen in hand, with two women whispering to him what he was to write for them. She made her way up the steep lane, through the busy, motley, malodorous crowd, until she reached the corner pointed out to her by Calabressa.

But he had not told her which way to turn, and for a second or two she stood in the middle of the crossing, uncertain and bewildered. A brawny-looking fellow, apparently a

butcher, addressed her; she murmured some thanks, and hastily turned away, taking to the right. She had not gone but a few yards when she saw the entrance to a court which, at least, was certainly as dark as that described by Calabressa. She was half afraid that the man who had spoken to her was following her; and so, without further hesitation, she plunged into this gloomy court-yard, which was apparently quite deserted.

She was alone, and she looked around. A second convinced her that she had hit upon the place, as it were by accident. Over her head swung an oil-lamp, that threw but the scantiest orange light into the vague shadows of the place; and in front of her were the open windows of what was apparently a wine-shop. She did not stay to reflect. Perhaps with some little tightening of the mouth—unknown to herself—she walked forward and entered the vaults.

Here, again, no one was visible; there were rows of tuns, certainly, and a musty odor in the place, but no sign of any trade or business being carried on. Suddenly out of the darkness appeared a figure—so suddenly indeed as to startle her. Had this man been seen in ordinary daylight, he would no doubt have looked nothing worse than a familiar type of the fat black-a-vised Italian—not a very comely person, it is true, but not in any way horrible—but now these dusky shadows lent something ghoulisn-looking to his bushy head and greasy face and sparkling black eyes.

“What is the pleasure of the young lady?” he said, curtly.

Natalie had been startled.

“I wished to inquire—I wished to mention,” she stammered, “one Bartolotti.”

But at the same time she was conscious of a strange sinking of the heart. Was this the sort of creature who was expected to save the life of her lover?—this the sort of man to pit against Ferdinand Lind? Poor old Calabressa—she thought he meant well, but he boasted, he was foolish.

This heavy-faced and heavy-bodied man in the dusk did not reply at once. He turned aside, saying,

“Excuse me, signorina, it is dark here; they have neglected to light the lamps as yet.”

Then, with much composure, he got a lamp, struck a match, and lit it. The light was not great, but he placed it deliberately so that it shone on Natalie, and then he calmly investigated her appearance.

“Yes, signorina, you mentioned one Bartolotti,” he remarked, in a more respectful tone.

Natalie hesitated. According to Calabressa's account, the mere mention of the name was to act as a talisman which would work wonders for her. This obese person merely stood there, awaiting what she should say.

"Perhaps," she said, in great embarrassment, "you know one Calabressa?"

"Ah, Calabressa!" he said, and the dull face lighted up with a little more intelligence. "Yes, of course, one knows Calabressa."

"He is a friend of mine," she said. "Perhaps, if I could see him, he would explain to you—"

"But Calabressa is not here; he is not even in this country, perhaps."

Then silence. A sort of terror seized her. Was this the end of all her hopes? Was she to go away thus? Then came a sudden cry, wrung from her despair.

"Oh, sir, you must tell me if there is no one who can help me! I have come to save one who is in trouble, in danger. Calabressa said to me, 'Go to Naples; go to such and such a place; the mere word Bartolotti will give you powerful friends; count on them; they will not fail one who belongs to the Berezolyis.' And now—"

"Your pardon, signorina; have the complaisance to repeat the name."

"Berezolyi," she answered, quickly; "he said it would be known."

"I for my part do not know it; but that is of no consequence," said the man. "I begin to perceive what it is that you demand. It is serious. I hope my friend Calabressa is justified. I have but to do my duty."

Then he glanced at the young lady—or, rather, at her costume.

"The assistance you demand for some one, signorina: is it a sum of money—is it a reasonable, ordinary sum of money that would be in the question, perhaps?"

"Oh no, signore; not at all!"

"Very well. Then have the kindness to write your name and your address for me: I will convey your appeal."

He brought her writing materials; after a moment's consideration she wrote—"Natalie Lind, the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi. Hotel ——." She handed him the paper.

"A thousand thanks, signorina. To-day, perhaps to-morrow, you will hear from the friends of Calabressa. You will be ready to go where they ask you to go?"

"Oh yes, yes, sir!" she exclaimed. "How can I thank you?"

"It is unnecessary," he said, taking the lamp to show her the way more clearly. "I have the honor to wish you good-morning, signorina." And again he bowed respectfully. "Your most humble servant, signorina."

She returned to the hotel, and found that her mother had gone up-stairs to her own room.

"Natalushka, you have been away trying to find some one?"

"Yes, mother," the girl said, rather sadly.

"Why did you go alone?"

"I thought I would not tire you, dear mother."

Then she described all the circumstances of her morning's visit.

"But why should you be so sad, Natalushka?" the mother said, taking her daughter's hand; "don't you know that fine palaces may have rusty keys? Oh, I can reassure you on that point, You will not have to deal with persons like your friend the wine-merchant—not at all. I know at least as much as that, child. But you see, they have to guard themselves."

Natalie would not leave the hotel for a moment. She pretended to read; but every person who came into the reading-room caused her to look up with a start of apprehensive inquiry. At last there came a note for her. She broke open the envelope hurriedly, and found a plain white card, with these words written on it:

"Be at the Villa Odelschalchi, Portici, at four this afternoon."

Joy leaped to her face again.

"Mother, look!" she cried, eagerly. "After all, we may hope."

"This time you shall not go alone, Natalushka."

"Why not, mother? I am not afraid."

"I may be of use to you, child. There may be friends of mine there—who knows? I am going with you."

In course of time they hired a carriage, and drove away through the crowded and gayly-colored city in the glow of the afternoon. But they had sufficient prudence, before reaching Portici, to descend from the carriage and proceed on foot. They walked quietly along, apparently not much interested in what was around them. Presently Natalie pressed her mother's arm, they were opposite the Villa Odelschalchi—there was the name on the flat pillars by the gate.

This great plain building, which might have been called a palazzo rather than a villa, seemed, on the side fronting the

street, to be entirely closed—all the casements of the windows being shut. But when they crossed to the gate, and pulled the big iron handle that set a bell ringing, a porter appeared—a big, indolent-looking man, who regarded them calmly, to see which would speak first.

Natalie simply produced the card that had been sent to her.

“This is the Villa Odelschalchi, I perceive,” she said.

“Oh, it is you, then, signorina?” the porter said, with great respect. “Yes, there was one lady to come here at four o’clock—”

“But the signora is my mother,” said Natalie, perhaps with a trifle of impatience.

The man hesitated for a moment, but by this time Natalie, accompanied by her mother, had passed through the cool gray archway into the spacious tessellated court, from which rose on each hand a wide marble staircase.

“Will the signorina and the signora her mother condescend to follow me?” the porter said, leading the way up one of the staircases, the big iron keys still in his hand.

They were shown into an antechamber, but scantily furnished, and the porter disappeared. In a minute or two there came into the room a small, sallow-complexioned man, who was no other than the Secretary Granaglia. He bowed, and, as he did so, glanced from the one to the other of the visitors with scrutiny.

“It is no doubt correct, signorina,” said he, addressing himself to Natalie, “that you have brought the signora your mother with you. We had thought you were alone, from the message we received. No matter; only”—and here he turned to Natalie’s mother—“only, signora, you will renew your acquaintance with one who wishes to be known by the name of Von Zoesch. I have no doubt the signora understands.”

“Oh, perfectly, perfectly!” said the elder woman: she had been familiar with these prudent changes of name all her life.

The Secretary Granaglia bowed and retired.

“It is some one who knows you, mother?” Natalie said, breathlessly.

“Oh, I hope so!” the other answered. She was a little pale, and her fingers were tightly clasped.

Then a heavier step was heard in the empty corridors outside. The door was opened; there appeared a tall and soldierly-looking man, about six feet three in height and per-

fectly erect, with closely-cropped white hair, a long white mustache, a reddish face, and clear, piercing, light-blue eyes. The moment the elder woman saw him she uttered a slight cry—of joy, it seemed, and surprise—and sprung to her feet.

“Stefan!”

“Natalie!” he exclaimed, in turn with an almost boyish laugh of pleasure, and he came forward to her with both hands outstretched, and took hers. “Why, what good wind has brought you to this country? But I beg a thousand pardons—”

He turned and glanced at Natalie.

“My child,” she said, “let me present you to my old friend, General—”

“Von Zoesch,” he interrupted, and he took Natalie’s hand at the same time. “What, you are the young lady, then, who bearded the lion in his den this morning?—and you were not afraid? No, I can see you are a Berezolyi; if you were a man you would be forever getting yourself and your friends into scrapes, and risking your neck to get them out again. A Berezolyi, truly! ‘The more beautiful daughter of a beautiful mother!’ But the little scamp knew his insulting iambics were only fit to be thrown into the fire when he made that unjust comparison. Ah, you young people have fresh complexions and bright eyes on your side, but we old people prefer our old friends.”

“I hope so, sir,” said Natalie, with her eyes bent down.

“And had your father no other messenger that he must employ you?” said this erect, white-haired giant, who regarded her in a kindly way; “or is it that feather-brained fellow Calabressa who has got you to intercede for him? Rest assured. Calabressa will soon be in imminent peril of being laid by the heels, and he is therefore supremely happy.”

Before the girl could speak he had turned to the mother.

“Come, my old friend, shall we go out into the garden? I am sorry the reception-rooms in the villa are all dismantled; in truth, we are only temporary lodgers. And I have a great many questions to ask you about old friends, particularly your father.”

“Stefan, can you not understand why I have permitted myself to leave Hungary?”

He glanced at her deep mourning.

“Ah, is that so? Well, no one ever lived a braver life. And how he kept up the old Hungarian traditions!—the house a hotel from month’s end to month’s end: no questions asked but ‘Are you a stranger? then my house is yours.’”

He led the way down the stairs, chatting to this old friend of his ; and though Natalie was burning with impatience, she forced herself to be silent. Was it not all in her favor that this member of the mysterious Council should recur to these former days, and remind himself of his intimacy with her family ? She followed them in silence : he seemed to have forgotten her existence.

They passed through the court-yard, and down some broad steps. The true front of the building was on this seaward side—a huge mass of pink, with green casements. From the broad stone steps a series of terraces, prettily laid out, descended to a lawn ; but, instead of passing down that way, the tall, soldierly-looking man led his companion by a side-flight of steps, which enabled them to enter an *allee* cut through a mass of olives and orange and lemon trees. There were fig-trees along the wall by the side of this path ; a fountain plashed coolly out there on the lawn, and beyond the opening showed the deep blue of the sea, with the clear waves breaking whitely on the shores.

They sat down on a garden-seat ; and Natalie, sitting next her mother, waited patiently and breathlessly, scarcely hearing all this talk about old companions and friends.

At last the general said,

“ Now about the business that brought you here : is it serious ? ”

“ Oh yes, very,” the mother said, with some color of excitement appearing in her worn face ; “ it is a friend of ours in England ; he has been charged by the Society with some duty that will cost him his life ; we have come to intercede for him—to ask you to save him. For the sake of old times, Stefan—”

“ Wait a moment,” said the other, looking grave. “ Do you mean the Englishman ? ”

“ Yes, yes ; the same.”

“ And who has told you what it is purposed to have done ? ” he asked, with quite a change in his manner.

“ No one,” she answered, eagerly ; “ we guess that it is something of great danger.”

“ And if that is so, are you unfamiliar with persons having to incur danger ? Why not an Englishman as well as another ? This is an extraordinary freak of yours, Natalie ; I cannot understand it. And to have come so far when any one in England—any one of us, I mean—could have told you it was useless.”

“ But why useless, if you are inclined to interfere ? ” she

said, boldly ; “and I think my father’s family have some title to consideration.”

“My old friend,” said he, in a kindly way, “what is there in the world I would not do for you if it were within my power ? But this is not. What you ask is, to put the matter shortly, impossible—impossible !”

In the brief silence that followed the mother heard a slight sigh ; she turned instantly, and saw her daughter, as white as death, about to fall. She caught her in her arms with a slight cry of alarm.

“Here, Stefan, take my handkerchief—dip it in the water—quick !”

The huge, bullet-headed man strode across the lawn to the fountain. As he returned, and saw before him the white-lipped, unconscious girl, who was supported in her mother’s arms, he said to himself, “Now I understand.”

CHAPTER XLVIII.

AN APPEAL.

THIS sudden and involuntary confession of alarm and despair no doubt told her story more clearly than anything else could have done. General von Zoesch, as he chose to call himself, was excessively concerned ; he held her hand till he saw the life returning to the pale, beautiful face : he was profuse and earnest in his apologies.

“My dear young lady I beg a thousand pardons !—I had no idea of alarming you ; I had no idea you were so deeply interested ; come, take my arm, and we will walk down into the open, where the sea-air is cool. I beg a thousand pardons.”

She had pulled herself together with a desperate effort of will.

“You spoke abruptly, signore ; you used the word *impossible* ! I had imagined it was unknown to you.”

Her lips were rather pale ; but there was a flush of color returning to her face, and her voice had something of the old proud and pathetic ring in it.

“Yes,” she continued, standing before him, with her eyes downcast, “I was told that when great trouble came upon me or mine I was to come here—to Naples—and I should find myself under the protection of the greatest power in

Europe. My name—my mother's name—was to be enough. And this is the result, that a brave man, who is our friend and dear to us, is threatened with a dishonorable death, and the very power that imposed it on him—the power that was said to be invincible, and wise, and generous—is unable or unwilling to stir hand or foot ! ”

“ A dishonorable death, signorina ? ”

“ Oh, signore,” she said, with a proud indignation, “ do not speak to me as if I were a child. Cannot one see what is behind all this secrecy ? Cannot one see that you know well what has been done in England by your friends and colleagues ? You put this man, who is too proud, too noble, to withdraw from his word, on a service that involves the certain sacrifice of his life ! and there is no honor attached to this sacrifice—so he himself has admitted. What does that mean ?—what can it mean—but assassination ? ”

He drew back his head a little bit, as if startled, and stared at her.

“ My dear young lady—”

But her courage had not returned to her for nothing. She raised the beautiful, dark, pathetic eyes, and regarded him with an indignant fearlessness.

“ That is what any one might guess,” she said. “ But there is more. Signore, you and your friends meditate the assassination of the King of Italy ! and you call on an Englishman—an Englishman who has no love of secret and blood-stained ways—”

“ Stefan ! ” the mother cried, quickly, and she placed her hand on the general's arm ; “ do not be angry. Do not heed her—she is a child—she is quick to speak. Believe me, there are other reasons for our coming to you.”

“ Yes, yes, my friend Natalie ; all in good time. But I am most anxious to put myself right with the signorina your daughter first of all. Now, my dear young lady,” he said, taking her hand, and putting it on his arm, and gently compelling her to walk with him toward the open space where the sea-air was cool, “ I again apologize to you for having spoken unwittingly—”

“ Oh, signore, do not trouble about that ! It is no matter of courtesy or politeness that is in the question : it is the life of one of one's dearest friends. There are other times for politeness.”

“ Stefan,” the mother interposed, anxiously, “ do not heed her—she is agitated.”

“ My dear Natalie,” said the general, smiling, “ I admire

a brave woman as I admire a brave man. Do not I recognize another of you Berezolyis? The moment you think one of your friends is being wronged, fire and water won't prevent you from speaking out. No, no, my dear young lady," he said, turning to the daughter, "you cannot offend me by being loyal and outspoken."

He patted her hand, just as Calabressa had done.

"But I must ask you to listen for a moment, to remove one or two misconceptions. It is true I know something of the service which your English friend has undertaken to perform. Believe me, it has nothing to do with the assassination of the King of Italy—nothing in the world."

She lifted her dark eyes for a second, and regarded him steadily.

"I perceive," said he, "that you pay me the compliment of asking me if I lie. I do not. Reassure yourself: there are no people in this country more loyal to the present dynasty than my friends and myself. We have no time for wild Republican projects."

She looked somewhat bewildered. This speculation as to the possible nature of the service demanded of George Brand had been the outcome of many a night's anxious self-communing; and she had indulged in the wild hope that this man, when abruptly challenged, might have been startled into some avowal. For then, would not her course have been clear enough? But now she was thrown back on her former perplexity, with only the one certainty present to her mind—the certainty of the danger that confronted her lover.

"My dear young lady," he said, "it is useless for you to ask what that service is, for I shall refuse to answer you. But I assure you that you have my deepest sympathy, and I have seen a good deal of suffering from similar causes. I do not seek to break into your confidence, but I think I understand your position; you will believe me that it is with no light heart that I must repeat the word *impossible*. Need I reason with you? Need I point out to you that there is scarcely any one in the world whom we might select for a dangerous duty who would not have some one who would suffer on his account? Who is without some tie of affection that must be cut asunder—no matter with what pain—when the necessity for the sacrifice arises? You are one of the unhappy ones; you must be brave; you must try to forget your sufferings, as thousands of wives and sweethearts and daughters have had to forget, in thinking that their relatives and friends died in a good cause."

Her heart was proud and indignant no longer ; it had grown numbed. The air from the sea felt cold.

"I am helpless, signore," she murmured ; "I do not know what the cause is. I do not know what justification you have for taking this man's life."

He did not answer that. He said,

"Perhaps, indeed, it is not those who are called on to sacrifice their life for the general good who suffer most. They can console themselves with thinking of the result. It is their friends—those dearest to them—who suffer, and who many a time would no doubt be glad to become their substitutes. It is true that we—that is, that many associations—recognize the principle of the vicarious performance of duties and punishments ; but not any one yet has permitted a woman to become substitute for a man."

"What made you think of that, signore ?" she asked, regarding him.

"I have known some cases," he said, evasively, "where such an offer, I think, would have been made."

"It could not be accepted ?"

"Oh no."

"Not even by the power that is the greatest in Europe ?" she said, bitterly—"that is invincible and all-generous ? Oh, signore, you are too modest in your pretensions ! And the Berezojys—they have done nothing, then, in former days to entitle them to consideration ; they are but as anybody in the crowd who might come forward and intercede for a friend ; they have no old associates, then, and companions in this Society, that they cannot have this one thing granted them—that they cannot get this one man's life spared to him ! Signore, your representatives mistake your powers ; more than that, they mistake the strength of your memory, and your friendship !"

The red face of the bullet-headed general grew redder still, but not with anger.

"Signorina," he said, evidently greatly embarrassed, "you humiliate me. You—you do not know what you ask—"

He had led her back to the garden-seat ; they had both sat down ; he did not notice how her bosom was struggling with emotion.

"You ask me to interfere—to commit an act of injustice—"

"Oh, signore, signore, this is what I ask !" she cried, quite overcome ; and she fell at his feet, and put her clasped hands on his knees, and broke into a wild fit of crying ; "this is what I ask of you, signore—this is what I beg from

you on my knees—I ask you to give me the life of—of my betrothed ! ”

She buried her face in her hands ; her frame was shaken with her sobs.

“ Little daughter,” said he, greatly agitated, “ rise ; come, remain here for a few moments ; I wish to speak to your mother—alone. Natalie ! ”

The elder woman accompanied him a short distance across across the lawn ; they stood by the fountain.

“ By Heaven, I would do anything for the child ! ” he said, rapidly ; “ but you see, dear friend, how it is impossible. Look at the injustice of it. If we transferred this duty to another person, what possible excuse could we make to him whom we might choose ? ”

He was looking back at the girl.

“ It will kill her, Stefan,” the mother said.

“ Others have suffered also.”

The elder woman seemed to collect herself a little.

“ But I told you we had not said everything to you. The poor child is in despair ; she has not thought of all the reasons that induced us to come to you. Stefan, you remember my cousin Konrad ? ”

“ Oh yes, I remember Konrad well enough,” said the general, absently, for he was still regarding the younger Natalie, who sat on the bench, her hands clasped, her head bent down. “ Poor fellow, he came to a sad end at last ; but he always carried his life in his hands, and with a gay heart too.”

“ But you remember, do you not, something before that ? ” the mother said, with some color coming into her face. “ You remember how my husband had him chosen—and I myself appealed—and you, Stefan, you were among the first to say that the Society must inquire—”

“ Ah, but that was different, Natalie. You know why it was that that commission had to be reversed.”

“ Do I know ? Yes. What else have I had to think about these sixteen or seventeen years since my child was separated from me ? ” she said, sadly. “ And perhaps I have grown suspicious ; perhaps I have grown mad to think that what has happened once might happen again.”

“ What ? ” he said, turning his clear blue eyes suddenly on her.

She did not flinch.

“ Consider the circumstances, Stefan, and say whether one has no reason to suspect. The Englishman, this Mr. Brand, loves Natalie ; she loves him in return ; my husband refuses

his consent to the marriage ; and yet they meet in opposition to his wishes. 'Then there is another thing that I cannot so well explain, but it is something about a request on my husband's part that Mr. Brand, who is a man of wealth, should accept a certain offer, and give over his property to the funds of the Society.'

"I understand perfectly," her companion said, calmly. "Well?"

"Well, Mr. Brand, thinking of Natalie's future, refuses. But consider this, Stefan, that it had been hinted to him before that in case of his refusal, he might be sent to America to remain there for life."

"I perceive, my old friend, that you are reading in your own interpretations into an ordinary matter of business. However—"

"But his refusal was immediately followed by that arrangement. He was ordered to go to America. My husband, no doubt considered that that would effectually separate him and Natalie—"

"Again you are putting in your own interpretation."

"One moment, Stefan. My child is brave ; she thought an injustice was being done ; she thought it was for her sake that her lover was being sent away, and then she spoke frankly ; she said she would go with him."

"Yes?" He was now listening with more interest.

"You perceive then, my dear friend, my husband was thwarted in every way. Then it was, and quite suddenly, that he reversed this arrangement about America, and there fell on Mr. Brand this terrible thing. Knowing what I know, do you not think I had fair cause for suspicion? And when Natalie said, 'Oh, there are those abroad who will remove this great trouble from us,' then I said to myself, 'At all events, the Society does not countenance injustice ; it will see that right has been done.'"

The face of the man had grown grave, and for some time he did not speak.

"I see what you suggest, Natalie," he said at length. "It is a serious matter. I should have said your suspicions were idle—that the thing was impossible—but for the fact that it has occurred before. Strange, now, if old ———, whose wisdom and foresight the world is beginning to recognize now, should be proved to be wise on this point too, as on so many others. He used always to say to us : 'When once you find a man unfaithful, never trust him after. When once a man has allowed himself to put his personal advantage before his duty

to such a society as yours, it shows that somewhere or other there is in him the leaven of a self-seeker, which is fatal to all societies. Impose the heaviest penalties on such an offence; cast him out when you have the opportunity.' It would be strange, indeed; it would be like fate; it would appear as though the thing were in the blood, and must come out, no matter what warning the man may have had before. You know, Natalie, what your husband had to endure for his former lapse?"

She nodded her head.

For some time he was again silent, and there was a deeper air of reflection on his face than almost seemed natural to it, for he looked more of a soldier than a thinker.

"If there were any formality," he said, almost to himself, "in the proceedings, one might have just cause to intervene. But your husband, my Natalie," he continued, addressing her directly, "is well trusted by us. He has done us long and faithful service. We should be slow to put any slight upon him, especially that of suspicion."

"That, Stefan," said Natalie's mother, with courage, "is a small matter, surely, compared with the possibility of your letting this man go to his death unjustly. You would countenance, then, an act of private revenge? That is the use you would let the powers of your Society be put to? That is not what Janecki, what Rausch, what Falevitch looked forward to."

The taunt was quite lost on him; he was calmly regarding Natalie. She had not stirred. After that one outburst of despairing appeal there was no more for her to say or to do. She could wait, mutely, and hear what the fate of her lover was to be.

"Unfortunately," said the general, turning and looking up at the vast pink frontage of the villa, "There are no papers here that one can appeal to. I only secured the temporary use of the villa, as being a more fitting place than some to receive the signorina your daughter. But it is possible the Secretary may remember something; he has a good memory. Will you excuse me, Natalie, for a few moments?"

He strode away toward the house. The mother went over to her daughter, and put a hand on her shoulder.

"Courage, Natalushka! You must not despair yet. Ah, my old friend Stefan has a kind heart; there were tears in his eyes when he turned away from your appeal to him. He does not forget old associates."

Von Zoesch almost immediately returned, still looking pre-

occupied. He drew Natalie's mother aside a few steps, and said,

"This much I may tell you, Natalie; in the proceedings four were concerned—your husband, Mr. Brand, Beratinsky, Reitzei. What do you know of these last two?"

"I? Alas, Stefan, I know nothing of them!"

"And we here little. They are your husband's appointment. I may also tell you, Natalie, that the Secretary is also of my opinion, that it is very unlikely your husband would be so audacious as to repeat his offence of former years, by conspiring to fix this duty on this man to serve his own interests. It would be too audacious, unless his temper had outrun his reason altogether."

"But you must remember, Stefan," she said, eagerly, "that there was no one in England who knew that former story. He could not imagine that I was to be, unhappily, set free to go to my daughter—that I should be at her side when this trouble fell on her—"

"Nevertheless," said he, gently interrupting her, "you have appealed to us: we will inquire. It will be a delicate affair. If there has been any complicity, any unfairness, to summon these men hither would be to make firmer confederates of them than ever. If one could get at them separately, individually—"

He kept pressing his white mustache into his teeth with his forefinger.

"If Calabressa were not such a talker," he said, absently. "But he has ingenuity, the feather-brained devil."

"Stefan, I could trust everything to Calabressa," she said.

"In the mean time," he said, "I will not detain you. If you remain at the same hotel we shall be able to communicate with you. I presume your carriage is outside?"

"It is waiting for us a little way off."

He accompanied them into the tessellated court-yard, but not to the gate. He bade good-bye to his elder friend; then he took the younger lady's hand and held it, and regarded her.

"Figliuola mia," he said, with a kindly glance, "I pity you if you have to suffer. We will hope for better things: if it is impossible, you have a brave heart."

When they had left he went up the marble staircase and along the empty corridor until he reached a certain room.

"Granaglia, can you tell me where our friend Calabressa may happen to be at this precise moment?"

"At Brindisi, I believe, Eccellenza."

“ At Brindisi still. The devil of a fellow is not so impatient as I had expected. Ah, well. Have the goodness to send for him, friend Granaglia, and bid him come with speed.”

“ Most willingly, Eccellenza.”

CHAPTER XLIX.

AN EMISSARY.

ONE warm, still afternoon Calabressa was walking quickly along the crowded quays of Naples, when he was beset by a more than usually importunate beggar—a youth of about twelve, almost naked.

“ Something for bread, signore—for the love of God—my father taken to heaven, my mother starving—bread, signore—”

“ To the devil with you !” said Calabressa.

“ May you burst !” replied the polite youth, and he tried to kick Calabressa’s legs and make off at the same time.

This feat he failed in, so that, as he was departing, Calabressa hit him a cuff on the side of the head which sent him rolling. Then there was a howl, and presently there was a universal tumult of women, calling out, “ Ah, the German ! ah, the foreigner !” and so forth, and drawing threateningly near. Calabressa sought in his pockets for a handful of small copper coins, turned, threw them high in the air, and did not stay to watch the effect of the shower on the heads of the women, but walked quietly away.

However, in thus suddenly turning, he had caught sight—even with his near-sighted eyes—of an unwholesome-looking young man, pale, clean-shaven, with bushy black hair, whom he recognized. He appeared to pay no attention, but walked quickly on. Taking one or two unnecessary turnings, he became convinced that the young man, as he had suspected, was following him ; then, without more ado, and even without looking behind him, he set out for his destination, which was Posilipo.

In due course of time he began to ascend the wooded hill with its villas and walls and cactus-hedges. At a certain turning, where he could not be observed by any one behind him, he turned sharp off to the left, and stood behind a wooden gate ; a couple of minutes afterward the young man

came along, more rapidly now, for he no doubt fancied that Calabressa had disappeared ahead.

Calabressa stepped out from his hiding-place, went after him, and tapped him on the shoulder. He turned, stared, and endeavored to appear angry and astonished.

"Oh yes, to be sure," said Calabressa, with calm sarcasm; "at your disposition, signore. So we were not satisfied with selling photographs and pebbles to the English on board the steamer; we want to get a little Judas money; we sell ourselves to the weasels, the worms, the vermin—"

"Oh, I assure you, signore—" the shaven-faced youth exclaimed, much more humbly.

"Oh, I assure you too, signore," Calabressa continued, facetiously. "And you, you poor innocent, you have not been with the weasels six weeks when you think you will try your nose in tracking me. Body of Bacchus, it is too insolent!"

"I assure you, signore—"

"Now, behold this, my friend; we must give children like you a warning. If you had been a little older, and not quite so foolish, I should have had you put on the Black List of my friends the Camorristi—you understand? But you—we will cure you otherwise. You know the Englishman's yacht that has come into the Great Harbor—"

"Signore, I beg of you—"

"Beg of the devil!" said Calabressa, calmly. "Between the Englishman's yacht and the Little Mole you will find a schooner moored—her name, *La Svezia*; do not forget—*La Svezia*. To-morrow you will go on board of her, ask for the captain, go down below, and beg him to be so kind as to give you twelve stripes—"

"Signore—"

"Another word, *mouchard*, and I make it twenty. He will give you a receipt, which you will sign, and bring to me; otherwise, down goes your name on the list. Which do you prefer? Oh, we will teach some of you young weasels a lesson! I have the honor to wish you a good morning."

Calabressa touched his hat politely, and walked on, leaving the young man petrified with rage and fear.

By-and-by he began to walk more leisurely and with more circumspection, keeping a sharp lookout, as well as his near-sighted eyes allowed, on any passer-by or vehicle he happened to meet. At length, and with the same precautions he had used on a former occasion, he entered the grounds of the villa he had sought out in the company of Gathorne Ed-

wards, and made his way up to the fountain on the little plateau. But now his message had been previously prepared; he dropped it into the receptacle concealed beneath the lip of the fountain, and then descended the steep little terraces until he got round to the entrance of the grotto.

Instead of passing in by this cleft in the rockwork, however, he found awaiting him there the person who had summoned him—the so-called General Von Zoesch. Calabressa was somewhat startled, but he said, “Your humble servant, Excellenza,” and removed his cap.

“Keep your hat on your head, friend Calabressa,” said the other, good-naturedly; “you are as old as I am.”

He seated himself on a projecting ledge of the rockwork, and motioned to Calabressa to do likewise on the other side of the entrance. They were completely screened from observation by a mass of olive and fig trees, to say nothing of the far-stretching orange shubbery beyond.

“The Council have paid you a high compliment, my Calabressa,” the general said, plunging at once into the matter. “They have resolved to intrust you with a very difficult mission.”

“It is a great honor.”

“You won’t have to risk your neck, which will no doubt disappoint you, but you will have to show us whether there is the stuff of a diplomatist in you.”

“Oh, as for that, Excellenza,” Calabressa said confidently, “one can be a *bavard* at times, for amusement, for nonsense; and one can at times be silent when there is necessity.”

“You know of the affair of Zaccatelli. The agent has been found, as we desired in England. I understand you know him; his name is Brand.”

Calabressa uttered an exclamation.

“Excellenza, do you know what you have said? You pierce my heart. Why he of all those in England? He is the betrothed of Natalie’s daughter—the Natalie Berezolyi, Excellenza, who married Ferdinand Lind—”

“I know it,” said the other, calmly. “I have seen the young lady. She is a beautiful child.”

“She is more than that—she is a beautiful-souled child!” said Calabressa, in great agitation; “and she has a tender heart. I tell you it will kill her, Excellenza! Oh, it is infamous! it is not to be thought of!” He jumped to his feet and spoke in a rapid, excited way. “I say it is not to be thought of. I appeal—I, Calabressa—to the honorable the members of the Council: I say that I am ready to be his

substitute—they cannot deny me—I appeal to the laws of the Society—”

“Calm yourself—calm yourself,” said the general; but Calabressa would not be calm.

“I will not have my beautiful child have this grief put upon her!—you, Excellenza, will help my appeal to the Council—they cannot refuse me—what use am I to anybody or myself? I say that the daughter of my old friend Natalie shall not have her lover taken from her; it is I, Calabressa, who claim to be his substitute!”

“Friend Calabressa, I desire you to sit down and listen. The story is brief that I have to tell you. This man Brand is chosen by the usual ballot. The young lady does not know for what duty, of course, but believes it will cost him his life. She is in trouble; she recollects your giving her some instructions; what does she do but start off at once for Naples, to put her head right into the den of the black bear Tommaso!”

“Ah, the brave little one! She did not forget Calabressa and the little map, then?”

“I have seen her and her mother.”

“Her mother, also? Here, in Naples, now?”

“Yes.”

“Great Heaven! What a fool I was to come through Naples and not to know—but I was thinking of that little viper.”

“You will now be good enough to listen, my Calabressa.”

“I beg your Excellency’s pardon a thousand times.”

“It appears that both mother and daughter are beset with the suspicion that this duty has been put upon their English friend by unfair means. At first I said to myself these suspicions were foolish; they now appear to me more reasonable. You, at all events, are acquainted with the old story against Ferdinand Lind; you know how he forfeited his life to the Society; how it was given back to him. You would think it impossible he would risk such another adventure. Well, perhaps I wrong him; but there is a possibility; there are powerful reasons, I can gather, why he should wish to get rid of this Englishman.”

Calabressa said nothing now, but he was greatly excited.

“We had been urging him about money, Calabressa mio—that I will explain to you. It has been coming in slowest of all from England, the richest of the countries, and just when we had so much need. Then, again, there is a vacancy in the Council, and Lind has a wish that way. What happens?

He tries to induce the Englishman to take an officership and give us his fortune ; the Englishman refuses ; he says then, ' Part from my daughter, and go to America.' The daughter says, ' If he goes, I follow.' You perceive, my friend, that if this story is true, and it is consecutive and minute as I received it, there was a reason for our colleague Lind to be angry, and to be desirous of making it certain that this Englishman who had opposed him should not have his daughter."

" I perceive it well, Excellenza. Meanwhile ?"

" Meanwhile, that is all. Only, when an old friend—when one who has such claims on our Society as a Berezolyi naturally has—comes and tells you such a story, you listen with attention and respect. You may believe, or you may not believe ; one prefers not to believe when the matter touches upon the faith of a colleague who has been trustworthy for many years. But at the same time, if the Council, being appealed to, and being anxious above all things that no wrong should be done, were to find an agent—prudent, silent, cautious—who might be armed with plenary powers of pardon, for example, supposing there were an accomplice to be bribed—if the Council were to commission such a one as you, my Calabressa, to institute inquiries, and perhaps to satisfy those two appellants that no injustice has been done, you would undertake the task with diligence, with a sense of responsibility, would you not ?"

" With joy—with a full heart, Excellenza !" Calabressa exclaimed.

" Oh no, not at all—with prudence and disinterestedness ; with calmness and no prejudice ; and, above all, with a resolution to conceal from our friend and colleague Lind that any slight of suspicion is being put upon him."

" Oh, you can trust me, Excellenza !" Calabressa said, eagerly.

" Let me do this for the sake of the sweetheart of my old age—that is that beautiful-souled little one ; and if I cannot bring her peace and security one way—mind, I go without prejudice—I swear to you I go without bias—I will harm no one even in intention—but this I say, that if I fail that way there is another."

" You have seen the two men, Beratinsky and Reitzei, who were of the ballot along with Lind and the Englishman. To me they are but names. Describe them to me."

" Beratinsky," said Calabressa, promptly, " a bear—surly, pig-headed ; Reitzei, a fop—sinuous, petted."

"Which would be the more easily started, for example?" the tall man said, with a smile.

"Oh, your Excellency, leave that to me," Calabressa answered. "Give me no definite instructions: am I not a volunteer?—can I not do as I please, always with the risk that one may knock me over the head if I am impertinent?"

"Well, then, if you leave it to your discretion, friend Calabressa, to your ingenuity, and your desire to have justice without bias, have you money?"

"Not at all, Excellenza."

"The Secretary Granaglia will communicate with you this evening. You can start at once?"

"By the direct train to-morrow morning at seven, Excellenza." Then he added, "Oh, the devil!"

"What now?"

"There was a young fellow, Excellenza, committed the imprudence of dogging my footsteps this afternoon. I know him. I stopped him and referred him to the captain of the schooner *La Svezia*: he was to bring me the receipt to-morrow."

"Never mind," said the general, laughing; "we will look after him when he goes on board. Now do you understand, friend Calabressa, the great delicacy of the mission the Council have intrusted to you? You must be patient, sure, unbiassed; and if, as I imagine, Lind and you were not the best of friends at one time in your life, you must forget all that. You are not going as the avenger of his daughter; you are going as the minister of justice—only you have power behind you; that you can allow to be known indirectly. Do you understand?"

"It is as clear as the noonday skies. Confide in me, Excellenza." The other rose.

"Use speed, my Calabressa. Farewell!"

"One word, Excellenza. If it is not too great a favor, the hotel where my beautiful Natalushka and her mother are staying?"

The other gave him the name of the hotel; and Calabressa, saluting him respectfully, departed, making his way down through the terraces of fruit-trees under the clear twilight skies.

Calabressa walked back to Naples, and to the hotel indicated, which was near the Castello dell' Ovo. No sooner had the hotel porter opened for him the big swinging doors than he recollected that he did not know for whom he ought to ask; but at this moment Natalie came along the corridor, dressed and ready to go out.

"My little daughter!" he exclaimed, taking her by both hands, "did not I say you would soon find me when there was need?"

"Will you come up-stairs and see my mother, Signor Calabressa?" said she. "You know why she and I are together now?—my grandfather is dead."

"Yes, I will go and see your mother," said he, after a second: she did not notice the strange expression of his face during that brief hesitation.

There was a small sitting-room between the two bedrooms; Natalie conducted him into it, and went into the adjoining chamber for her mother. A minute after these two friends and companions of former days met. They held each other's hand in silence for a brief time.

"My hair was not so gray when you last saw me," the worn-faced woman said, at length, with a smile.

Calabressa could not speak at all.

"Mother," the girl said, to break in on this painful embarrassment, "you have not seen Signor Calabressa for so long a time. Will he not stay and dine with us? the *table-d'hôte*, is at half-past six."

"Not the *table-d'hôte*, my little daughter," Calabressa said. "But if one were permitted to remain here, for example—"

"Oh yes, certainly."

"There are many things I wish to speak about; and so little time. To-morrow morning I start for England."

"For England?"

"Most certainly, little daughter. And you have a message, perhaps, for me to carry? Oh, you may let it be cheerful," he said, with his usual gay optimism. "I tell you—I myself, and I do not boast—let it be cheerful! What did I say to you? You are in trouble; I said to you, count upon having friends!"

Calabressa did stay; and they had a kind of meal in this room; and there was a great deal to talk over between the two old friends. But on all matters referring to the moment he preserved a resolute silence. He was not going to talk at the very outset. He was going to England—that was all.

But as he was bidding good-bye to Natalie, he drew her a step or two into the passage.

"Little child," said he, in a low voice, "your mother is suffering because of your sorrow. It is needless. I assure you all will be well: have I spoken in vain before? It is not for one bearing the name that you have to despair."

"Good-bye, then, Signor Calabressa."

"*Au revoir*, child: is not that better?"

CHAPTER L.

A WEAK BROTHER.

GEORGE BRAND was sitting alone in these rooms of his, the lamps lit, the table near him covered with papers. He had just parted with two visitors—Molyneux and a certain learned gentleman attached to Owens College—who had come to receive his final plans and hints as to what still lay before them in the north. On leaving, the fresh-colored, brisk-voiced Molyneux had said to him,

"Well, Mr. Brand, seeing you so eager about what has to be done up there, one might wonder at your leaving us and going off pleasuring. But no matter; a man must have his holiday; so I wish you a pleasant journey, and we'll do our best till you come back."

So that also was settled. In fact, he had brought all his affairs up to a point that would enable him to start at any moment. But about Natalie? He had not heard from her through any channel whatever. He had not the least idea whither she had gone. Moreover, he gathered from Reitzei that her father—who, in Reitzei's opinion, could at once have discovered where she was—refused to trouble himself in the matter, and, indeed, would not permit her name to be mentioned in his presence.

He leaned back in his chair with a sigh. Of what value to him now were these carefully calculated suggestions about districts, centres, conveners, and what not? And yet he had appeared deeply interested while his two visitors were present. For the time being the old eagerness had stirred him; the pride he had taken in his own work. But now that was passed from him; he had relinquished his stewardship; and as he absently gazed out into the black night before him, his thoughts drifted far away. He was startled from his reverie by some one knocking at the door. Immediately after Gathorne Edwards entered.

"Waters said I should find you alone," said the tall, pale, blue-eyed student. "I have come to you about Kirski."

"Sit down. Well?"

"It's a bad business," he said, taking a chair, and looking rather gloomy and uncomfortable. "He has taken to drink badly. I have been to him, talked to him, but I have no influence over him, apparently. I thought perhaps you might do something with him."

"Why, I cannot even speak to him!"

"Oh, he is accustomed to make much out of a few words; and I would go with you."

"But what is the occasion of all this? How can he have taken to drink in so short a time?"

"A man can drink himself into a pretty queer state in a very short time when he sets his mind to it," Edwards said. "He has given up his work altogether, and is steadily boozing away the little savings he had made. He has gone back to his blood and kill, too; wants some one to go with him to murder that fellow out in Russia who first of all took his wife, and then beat him and set dogs on him. The fact is, Calabressa's cure has gone all to bits."

"It is a pity. The unfortunate wretch has had enough trouble. But what is the cause of it?"

"It is rather difficult to explain," said Edwards with some embarrassment. "One can only guess, for his brain is muddled, and he maunders. You know Calabressa's flowery, poetical interpretation. It was Miss Lind, in fact, who had worked a miracle. Well, there was something in it. She was kind to him, after he had been cuffed about Europe, and a sort of passion of gratitude took possession of him. Then he was led to believe at that time that—that he might be of service to her or her friends, and he gave up his projects of revenge altogether—he was ready for any sacrifice—and, in fact, there was a project—" Edwards glanced at his companion; but Brand happened at that moment to be looking out of the window.

"Well, you see, all that fell through; and he had to come back to England disappointed; then there was no Calabressa to keep him up to his resolutions; besides that, he found out—how, I do not know—that Miss Lind had left London."

"Oh, he found that out?"

"Apparently. And he says he is of no further use to anybody; and all he wants is to kill the man Michaieloff, and then make an end of himself."

Brand rose at once.

"We must go and see the unfortunate devil, Edwards. His brain never was steady, you know, and I suppose even two or three days' hard drinking has made him wild again. And just as I had prepared a little surprise for him!"

"What?" Edwards asked, as he opened the door.

"I have made him a little bequest that would have produced him about twenty pounds a year, to pay his rent. It will be no kindness to give it to him until we see him straight again."

But Edwaards pushed the door to again, and said in a low voice,

"Of course, Mr. Brand, you must know of the Zaccatelli affair?"

Brand regarded him, and said, calmly,

"I do. There are five men in England who know of it; you and I are two of them."

"Well," said Edwards, eagerly, "if such a thing were determined on, wouldn't it have been better to let this poor wretch do it? He would have gloried in it; he had the enthusiasm of the martyr just then; he thought he was to be allowed to do something that would make Miss Lind and her friends forever grateful to him."

"And who put it into his head that Miss Lind knew anything about it?—Calabressa, I suppose."

Edwards colored slightly.

"Well, yes—"

"And it was Calabressa who intrusted such a secret as that to a maniac—"

"Pardon me, Kirski never knew specifically what lay before him; but he was ready for anything. For my own part, I was heartily glad when they sent him back to England. I did not wish to have any hand in such a business, however indirectly; and, indeed, I hope they have abandoned the whole project by this time."

"It might be wiser, certainly," said Brand, with an indifferent air.

"If they go on with it, it will make a fearful noise in Europe," said Edwards, contemplatively. "The assassination of a cardinal! Well, his life has been scandalous enough—but still, his death, in such a way—"

"It will horrify people, will it not?" Brand said, calmly; and his murderer will be execrated and howled at throughout Europe, no doubt!"

"Well, yes; you see, who is to know the motives?"

"There wont be a single person to say a single word for him," said Brand, absently. "It is an enviable fate, isn't it, for some wretched mortal? No matter, Edwards; we will go and look up this fellow Kirski now."

They went out into the night—it was cold and drizzling—and made their way up into Soho. They knocked at the door of a shabby-looking house; and Kirski's landlady made her appearance. She was very angry when his name was mentioned; of course he was not at home; they would find him in some public-house or other—the animal!

"But he pays his rent, doesn't he?" Brand remonstrated.

Oh yes, he paid his rent. But she didn't like a wild beast in the house. It was decent lodgings she kept; not a Wombwell's Menagerie.

"I am sure he gives you no trouble, ma'am," said Edwards, who had seen something of the meek and submissive way the Russian conducted himself in his lodgings.

This she admitted, but promptly asked how she was to know she mightn't have her throat cut some night? And what was the use of her talking to him, when he didn't know two words of a Christian language?

They gathered from this that the good woman had been lecturing her docile lodger, and had been seriously hurt because of his inattention. However, she at last consented to give them the name of the particular public-house in which he was likely to be found, and they again set off in quest of him.

They found him easily. He was seated in a corner of the crowded and reeking bar-room, by himself, nursing a glass of gin-and-water with his two trembling hands. When they entered, he looked up and regarded them with bleared, sunken eyes, evidently recognized them, and then turned away sullenly.

"Tell him I am not come to bully him," said Brand quickly. "Tell him I am come about some work. I want a cabinet made by a first-class workman like himself."

Edwards went forward and put his hand on the man's shoulder and spoke to him for some time; then he turned to Brand.

"He says, 'No use; no use.' He cannot work any more. They won't give him help to kill Pavel Michaieloff. He wishes to die."

"Ask him, then, what the young lady who gave him her portrait will think of him if she hears he is in this condition. Ask him how he has dared to bring her portrait into a place like this."

When this was conveyed to Kirski, he seemed to arouse himself somewhat; he even talked eagerly for a few seconds; then he turned away again, as if he did not wish to be seen.

"He says," Edwards continued, "that he has not, that he would not bring that portrait into any such place. He was afraid it might be found—it might be taken from him. He made a small casket of oak, carved by his own hands, and lined it with zinc; he put the photograph in it, and hid himself in the trees of St. James's Park—at least, I imagine that St. James's Park is what he means—at night. Then he buried it there. He knows the place. When he has killed Michaieloff he will come back and dig it up."

"The poor devil—his brain is certainly going, drink or no drink. What is to be done with him, Edwards?"

"He says the young lady has gone away. He cares for nothing. He is of no use. He despairs of getting enough money to take him back to Russia."

After a great deal of persuasion, however, they got him to leave the public-house with them and return to his lodgings. They got him some tea and some bread-and-butter, and made him swallow both. Then Edwards, under his friend's instructions, proceeded to impress on Kirski that the young lady was only away from London for a short time; that she would be greatly distressed if she were to hear he had been misconducting himself; that, if he returned to his work on the following morning, he would find that his master would overlook his absence; and that finally, he was to abandon his foolish notions about going to Russia, for he would find no one to assist him; whereas, on the other hand, if he went about proclaiming that he was about to commit a crime, he would be taken by the police and shut up. All this, and a great deal more, they tried to impress on him; and Edwards promised to call the next evening and see how he was getting on.

It was late when Brand and Edwards again issued out into the wet night; and Edwards, having promised to post a line to Kirski's employers, so that they should get it in the morning, said good-bye, and went off to his own lodgings. Brand walked slowly home through the muddy streets. He preferred the glare and the noise to the solitude of his own rooms. He even stood aimlessly to watch a theatre come out; the people seemed so careless and joyous—calling to each other—making feeble jokes—passing away under their umbrellas into the wet and shining darkness.

But at length, without any definite intention, he found himself at the foot of the little thoroughfare in which he lived; and he was about to open the door with his latch-key when out of the dusk beyond there stepped forth a tall figure. He was startled, it is true, by the apparition of this tall, white-haired man in the voluminous blue cloak, the upturned hood of which half concealed his face, and he turned with a sort of instinct of anger to face him.

"Monsieur mon frere, you have arrived at last!" said the stranger, and instantly he recognized in the pronunciation of the French the voice of Calabressa.

"What!" he said; "Calabressa?"

The other put a finger on his arm.

"Hush!" he said. "It is a great secret, my being here :

I confide in you. I would not wait in your rooms—my faith, no! for I said to myself, ‘What if he brings home friends who will know me, who will ask what the devil Calabressa is doing in this country.’”

Brand had withdrawn his hand from the lock.

“Calabressa,” he said, quickly, “you, if anybody knows, must know where Natalie and her mother are. Tell me!”

“I will directly; but may I point out to you, my dear Monsieur Brand, that it rains—that we might go inside? Oh yes, certainly, I will tell you when we can say a word in secret, in comfort. But this devil of a climate! What should I have done if I had not bought myself this cloak in Paris? In Paris it was cold and wet enough; but one had nothing like what you have here. Saprìsti! my fingers are frozen.”

Brand hurried him up-stairs, put him into an easy-chair, and stirred up the fire.

“Now,” said he, impatiently—“now, my dear Calabressa, your news!”

Calabressa pulled out a letter.

“The news—voilà!”

Brand tore open the envelope; these were the contents:

“DEAREST,—This is to adjure you not to leave England for the present—not till you hear from me—or until we return. Have patience, and hope. You are not forgotten. My mother sends you her blessing. YOUR BETROTHED.”

“But there is no address!” he exclaimed. “Where are they?”

“Where are they? It is no secret, do you see? They are in Naples.”

“In Naples!”

“Oh, I assure you, my dear friend, it is a noble heart, a brave heart, that loves you. Many a day ago I said to her, ‘Little child, when you are in trouble, go to friends who will welcome you; say you are the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi; say to them that Calabressa sent you.’ And you thought she was in no trouble! Ah, did she not tell me of the pretty home you had got for the poor mother who is my old friend? did she not tell me how you thought they were to be comfortable there, and take no heed of anything else? But you were mistaken. You did not know her. She said, ‘My betrothed is in danger: I will take Calabressa at his word: before any one can hinder me, or interfere, I will go and appeal, in the name of my family, in the name of myself!’ Ah, the brave child!”

"But appeal to whom?" said Brand, breathlessly.

"To the Council, my friend!" said Calabressa with exultation.

"But gracious heavens!" Brand cried, with his hand nervously clutching the arm of his chair, "is the secret betrayed, then? Do they think I will shelter myself behind a woman?" ●

"She could betray no secret," Calabressa said, triumphantly, "she herself not knowing it, do you not perceive? But she could speak bravely!"

"And the result?"

"Who knows what that may be? In the mean time, this is the result—I am here!"

At another moment this assumption of dignity would have been ludicrous; but Brand took no heed of the manner of his companion; his heart was beating wildly. And even when his reason forced him to see how little he could expect from this intervention—when he remembered what a decree of the Council was, and how irrevocable the doom he had himself accepted—still the thought uppermost in his mind was not of his own safety or danger, but rather of her love and devotion, her resolve to rescue him, her quick and generous impulse that knew nothing of fear. He pictured her to himself in Naples, calling upon this nameless and secret power, that every man around him dreaded, to reverse its decision! And then the audacity of her bidding him hope! He could not hope; he knew more than she did. But his heart was full of love and of gratitude as he thought of her.

"My dear friend," said Calabressa, lowering his voice, "my errand is one of great secrecy. I have a commission which I cannot altogether explain to you. But in the mean time you will be so good as to give me—in *extenso*, with every particular—the little history of how you were appointed to—
to undertake a certain duty."

"Unfortunately, I cannot," Brand said, calmly; "these are things one is not permitted to talk about."

"But I must insist on it, my dear friend."

"Then I must insist on refusing you."

"You are trustworthy. No matter: here is something which I think will remove your suspicions, my good friend—or shall we not rather say your scruples?"

He took from his pocket-book a card, and placed it somewhat ostentatiously on the table. Brand examined it, and then stared at Calabressa in surprise.

“You come with the authority of the Council?”

“By the goodness of Heaven,” Calabressa exclaimed, with a laugh, “you have arrived at the truth this time!”

CHAPTER LI.

THE CONJURER.

THERE was no mistaking the fact that Calabressa had come armed with ample authority from the Council, and yet it was with a strange reluctance that Brand forced himself to answer the questions that Calabressa proceeded to put to him. He had already accepted his doom. The bitterness of it was over. He would rather have let the past be forgotten altogether, and himself go forward blindly to the appointed end. Why those needless explanations and admissions?

Moreover, Calabressa's questions, which had been thought over during long railway journeys, were exceedingly crafty. They touched here and there on certain small points, as if he were building up for himself a story. But at last Brand said, by way of protest,

“Look here, Calabressa. I see you are empowered to ask me any questions you like—and I am quite willing to answer—about the business of the Council. But really, don't you see, I would rather not speak of private matters. What can the Council want to know about Natalie Lind? Leave her out of it, like a good fellow.”

“Oh yes, my dear Monsieur Brand,” said Calabressa, with a smile, “leave her out of it, truly, when she has gone to the Council; when the Council have said, ‘Child, you have not appealed to us for nothing;’ when it is through her that I have travelled all through the cold and wet, and am now sitting here. Remember this, my friend, that the beautiful Natalushka is now a—what do you call it?—a *ward*” (Calabressa put this word in English into the midst of his odd French), “and a *ward* of a sufficiently powerful court, I can assure you, monsieur! Therefore, I say, I cannot leave the beautiful child out. She is of importance to me; why am I here otherwise? Be considerate, my friend; it is not impertinence; it is not curiosity.”

Then he proceeded with his task; getting, in a roundabout, cunning, shrewd way, at a pretty fair version of what

had occurred. And he was exceedingly circumspect. He endeavored, by all sorts of circumlocutions, to hide from Brand the real drift of his inquiry. He would betray suspicion of no one. His manner was calm, patient, almost indifferent. All this time Brand's thoughts were far away. He was speaking to Calabressa, but he was thinking of Naples.

But when they came to Brand's brief description of what took place in Lisle Street on the night of the casting of the lot, Calabressa became greatly excited, though he strove to appear perfectly calm.

"You are sure," he said, quickly, "that was precisely what happened?"

"As far as I know," said Brand, carelessly. "But why go into it? If I do not complain, why should any one else?"

"Did I say that any one complained?" observed the astute Calabressa.

"Then why should any one wish to interfere? I am satisfied. You do not mean to say, Calabressa, that any one over there thinks that I am anxious to back out of what I have undertaken—that I am going down on my knees and begging to be let off? Well, at all events, Natalie does not think that," he added, as if it did not matter much what any other thought.

Calabressa was silent; but his eyes were eager and bright, and he was quickly tapping the palm of his left hand with the forefinger of the right. Then he regarded Brand with a sharp, inquisitive look. Then he jumped to his feet.

"Good-night, my friend," he said, hurriedly.

But Brand rose also, and sought to detain him.

"No, no, my good Calabressa, you are not going yet; you have kept me talking for your amusement; now it is your turn. You have not yet told me about Natalie and her mother."

"They are well—they are indeed well, I assure, you," said Calabressa, uneasily. He was clearly anxious to get away. By this time he had got hold of his cloak and swung it round his shoulders.

"Calabressa, sit down, and tell me something about Natalie. What made her undertake such a journey? Is she troubled? Is she sad? I thought her life was full of interest now, her mother being with her."

Calabressa had got his cap, and had opened the door.

"Another time, dear Monsieur Brand, I will sit down and

tell you all about the beautiful, brave child, and my old friend her mother. Yes, yes—another time—to-morrow—next day. At present one is overwhelmed with affairs, do you see?”

So saying, he forced Brand to shake hands with him, and went out, shutting the door behind him.

But no sooner had he got into the street than the eager, talkative, impulsive nature of the man, so long confined, broke loose. He took no heed that it was raining hard. He walked fast; he talked aloud to himself in his native tongue, in broken interjectional phrases; occasionally he made use of violent gestures, which were not lessened in their effect by the swaying cape of his cloak.

“Ah, those English—those English!” he was excitedly saying—“such children!—blue, clear eyes that see nothing—the devil! why should they meddle in such affairs? To play at such a game!—fool’s mate; scholar’s mate; asses and idiots’ mate—they have scarcely got a pawn out, and they are wondering what they will do, when whizz! along comes the queen, and she and the bishop have finished all the fine combinations before they were ever begun! And you, you others, imps of hell, to play that old foolish game again! But take care, my friends, take care; there is one watching you, one waiting for you, who does not speak, but who strikes! Ah, it is a pretty game; you, you sullen brute; you, you fop and dandy; but when you are sitting silent round the board, behold a dagger flashes down and quivers into the wood! No wonder your eyes burn! you do not know whence it has come? But the steel-blade quivers; is it a warning?”

He laughed aloud, but there were still omnibuses and cabs in the street; so he was not heard. Indeed, the people who were on the pavement were hurrying past to get out of the rain, and took no notice of the old albino in the voluminous cloak.

“Natalushka,” said he, quite as if he were addressing some one before him, “do you know that I am trudging through the mud of this infernal city all for you? And you, little sybarite, are among the fine ladies of the reading-room at the hotel, and listening to music, and the air all scented around you. Never mind; if only I had a little bird that could fly to you with a message—ah, would you not have pleasant dreams no-night? Did I not tell you to rely on Calabressa? He chatters to you; he tries to amuse you; but he is not always Policinella. No, not always Policinella: sometimes he is silent and cunning; sometimes—what do you think?—

he is a conjurer. Oh yes, you are not seen, you are not heard; but when you have them round the board, whirr! comes the gleaming blade and quivers in the wood! You look round; the guilty one shakes with the palsy; his wits go; his startled tongue confesses. Then you laugh; you say, 'That is well done;' you say, 'Were they wrong in giving this affair to Calabressa?'"

Now, whether it was that his rapid walking helped to relieve him of this over-excitement, or whether it was that the soaking rain began to make him uncomfortable, he was much more staid in demeanor when he got up to the little lane in Oxford Street where the Culturverein held its meetings. Of course, he did not knock and demand admission. He stopped some way down the street, on the other side, where he found shelter from the rain in a door-way, and whence he could readily observe any one coming out from the hall of the Verein. Then he succeeded in lighting a cigarette.

It was a miserable business, this waiting in the cold, damp night air; but sometimes he kept thinking of how he would approach Reitzei in the expected interview; and sometimes he thought of Natalie; and again, with his chilled and dripping fingers he would manage to light a cigarette. Again and again the door of the hall was opened, and this or the other figure came out from the glare of the gas into the dark street; but so far no Reitzei. It was now nearly one in the morning.

Finally, about a quarter past one, the last batch of boon companions came out, and the lights within were extinguished. Calabressa followed this gay company, who were laughing and joking despite the rain, for a short way; but it was clear that neither Beratinsky nor Reitzei was among them. Then he turned, and made his way to his own lodgings, where he arrived tired, soaked through, but not apparently disheartened.

Next morning he was up betimes, and at a fairly early hour walked along to Coventry Street, where he took up his station at the east corner of Rupert Street, so that he could see any one going westward, himself unseen. Here he was more successful. He had not been there ten minutes when Reitzei passed. Calabressa hastened after him, overtook him, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Ah, Calabressa!" said Reitzei, surprised, but in noway disconcerted.

"I wish to speak with you," said Calabressa, himself a little agitated, though he did not show it.

"Certainly; come along. Mr. Lind will arrive soon."

"No, alone. I wish to speak to you alone."

Calabressa looked around. The only place of shelter he saw was a rather shabby restaurant, chiefly used as a supper-room, and at this moment having the appearance of not being yet woke up. Reitzei was in a compliant mood. He suffered himself to be conducted into this place, to the astonishment of one or two unwashed-looking waiters, who were seated and reading the previous evening's papers. Calabressa and Reitzei sat down at one of the small tables; the former ordered some coffee, the latter a bottle of soda-water.

By this time Calabressa had collected himself for the part he was about to play.

"Well, my friend," said he, cheerfully, "what news? When is Europe to hear the fate of the Cardinal?"

"I don't know; I know very little about it," said Reitzei, glancing at him rather suspiciously.

"It is a terrible business," said Calabressa, reflectively, "a decree of the Council. You would think that one so powerful, so well protected, would be able to escape, would you not? But he himself knows better. He knows he is as powerless as you might be, for example, or myself."

"Oh, as for that," said Reitzei, boldly, "he knows he has deserved it: what more? He has had his little fling, now comes the settlement of the score."

"And I hear that our friend Brand is to be the instrument of justice: how strange! He has not been so long with us."

"That is Mr. Lind's affair: it has nothing to do with me," said Reitzei, shortly.

"Well," said Calabressa, toying with his coffee-cup. "I hope I shall never be tempted to do anything that might lead the Council to condemn me. Fancy such a life; every moment expecting some one to step up behind you with a knife or a pistol, and the end sure! I would take Provana's plan. The poor devil; as soon as he heard he had been condemned he could not bear living. He never thought of escape: a few big stones in the pockets of his coat, and over he slips into the Arno. And Mesentskoff: you remember him? His only notion of escape was to give himself up to the police—twenty-five years in the mines. I think Provana's plan was better."

Reitzei became a little uneasy, or perhaps only impatient.

"Well, Calabressa," he said, "one must be getting along to one's affairs—"

"Oh yes, yes, truly," Calabressa said. "I only wished to know a little more about the Cardinal. You see he cannot

give himself up like Mesentskoff, though he might confess to a hundred worse things than the Russian ever did. Provana—well, you know the Society has always been inexorable with regard to its own officers: and rightly, too, Reitzei, is it not so? If one finds malversation of justice among those in a high grade, should not the punishment be exemplary? The higher the power, the higher the responsibility. You, for example, are much too shrewd a man to risk your life by taking any advantage of your position as one of the officers—”

“I don’t understand you, Calabressa,” the other said, somewhat hotly.

“I only meant to say,” Calabressa observed, carelessly, “that the punishment for malversation of justice on the part of an officer is so terrible, so swift, and so sure, that no one but a madman would think of running the risk—”

“Yes, but what has that to do with me?” Reitzei said, angrily.

“Nothing, my dear friend, nothing,” said Calabressa, soothingly. “But now, about this selection of Mr. Brand—”

Reitzei turned rather pale for a second; but said instantly, and with apparent anger,

“I tell you that is none of my business. That is Mr. Lind’s business. What have I to do with it?”

“Do not be so impatient, my friend,” said Calabressa, looking at his coffee. “We will say that, as usual, there was a ballot. All quite fair. No man wishes to avoid his duty. It is the simplest thing in the world to mark one of your pieces of paper with a red mark: whoever receives the marked paper undertakes the commission. All is quite fair, I say. Only you know, I dare say, the common, the pitiful trick of the conjurer who throws a pack of cards on the table, backs up. You take one, look at it privately, return it, and the cards are shuffled. Without lifting the cards at all he tells you that the one you selected was the eight of diamonds: why? It is no miracle: all the cards are eight of diamonds; though you, you poor innocent, do not know that. It is a wretched trick,” added Calabressa, coolly.

Reitzei drank off the remainder of his soda-water at a gulp. He stared at Calabressa in silence, afraid to speak.

“My dear friend Reitzei,” said Calabressa, at length raising his eyes and fixing them on his companion, “you could not be so insane as to play any trick like that?—having four pieces of paper, for example, all marked red, the marks under the paper? You would not enter into any such conspir-

acy, for you know, friend Reitzei, that the punishment is—death!”

The man had turned a ghastly gray-green color. He was apparently choking with thirst, though he had just finished the soda-water. He could not speak.

Calabressa calmly waited for him; but in his heart he was saying exultingly, “*Ha! the dagger quivers in the board; his eyes are starting from his head; is it Calabressa or Cagliostro that has paralyzed him?*”

At length the wretched creature opposite him gasped out, “Beratinsky—”

But he could say no more. He motioned to a waiter to bring him some soda-water.

“Yes, Beratinsky?” said Calabressa, calmly regarding the livid face.

“—has betrayed us!” he said, with trembling lips. In fact, there was no fight in him at all, no angry repudiation; he was helpless with this sudden bewilderment of fear.

“Not quite,” said Calabressa; and he now spoke in a low, eager voice. “It is for you to save yourself by forestalling him. It is your one chance; otherwise the decree; and good-bye to this world for you! See—look at this card—I say it is your only chance, friend Reitzei—for I am empowered by the Council to promise you, or Beratinsky, or any one, a free pardon on confession. Oh, I assure you the truth is clear: has not one eyes? You, poor devil, you cannot speak: shall I go to Beratinsky and see whether he can speak?”

“What must I do—what must I do?” the other gasped, in abject terror. Calabressa, regarding this exhibition of cowardice, could not help wondering how Lind had allowed such a creature to associate with him.

Then Calabressa, sure of victory, began to breathe more freely. He assumed a lofty air.

“Trust in me, friend Reitzei. I will instruct you. If you can persuade the Council of the truth of your story, I promise you they will absolve you from the operations of a certain Clause which you know of. Meanwhile you will come to my lodgings and write a line to Lind, excusing yourself for the day; then this evening I dare say it will be convenient for you to start for Naples. Oh, I assure you, you owe me thanks: you did not know the danger you were in; hereafter you will say, ‘Well, it was no other than Calabressa who pulled me out of that quagmire.’”

A few minutes thereafter Calabressa was in a telegraph-office, and this was the message he despatched :

“ Colonna, London : to Bartolotti, Vicolo Isotta, No. 15, Naples. Ridotto will arrive immediately, colors down. Send orders for Luigi and Bassano to follow.”

“ It is a bold stroke,” he was saying to himself, as he left the office, “ but I have run some risks in my time. What is one more or less ? ”

CHAPTER LII.

FIAT JUSTITIA.

THIS scheme of Calabressa's had been so rapidly conceived and put in execution, that he had had no time to think of its possible or certain consequences, in the event of his being successful. His immediate and sole anxiety was to make sure of his captive. There was always the chance that a frightened and feeble creature like Reitzei might double back ; he might fly to Lind and Beratinsky, and seek security in a new compact ; for who could prove any thing if the three were to maintain their innocence ? However, as Calabressa shrewdly perceived, Reitzei was in the dark as to how much the Council knew already. Moreover, he had his suspicions of Beratinsky. If there was to be a betrayal, he was clearly resolved to have the benefit of it. Nevertheless, Calabressa did not lose sight of him for a moment. He took him to his, Calabressa's lodgings ; kept assuring him that he ought to be very grateful for being thus allowed to escape ; got him to write and despatch a note to Lind, excusing himself for that day and the next, and then proceeded to give him instructions as to what he should do in Naples. These instructions, by-the-way, were entirely unnecessary ; it is no part of Calabressa's plan to allow Reitzei to arrive in Naples alone.

After a mid-day meal, Calabressa and Reitzei walked up to the lodgings of the latter, where he got a few travelling things put together. By-and-by they went to the railway station, Calabressa suggesting that it was better for Reitzei to get away from London as soon as possible. The old albino saw his companion take his seat in the train for Dover, and then turned away and re-entered the busy world of the London streets.

The day was fine after the rain ; the pavements were white and dry ; he kept in the sunlight for the sake of the warmth ; but he had not much attention for the sights and sounds around him. Now that this sudden scheme promised to be entirely successful, he could consider the probable consequences of that success ; and, as usual, his first thought was about Natalie.

“ Poor child—poor child ! ” he said to himself, rather sadly. “ How could she tell how this would end ? If she saves the life of her lover, it is at the cost of the life of her father. The poor child !—must misfortune meet her whichever way she turns ? ”

And then, too, some touch of compunction or even remorse entered into his own bosom. He had been so eager in the pursuit ? he had been so anxious to acquit himself to the satisfaction of the Council, that he had scarcely remembered that his success would almost certainly involve the sacrifice of one who was at least an old colleague. Ferdinand Lind and Calabressa had never been the very best of friends ; during one period, indeed, they had been rivals ; but that had been forgotten in the course of years, and what Calabressa now remembered was that Lind and he had at least been companions in the old days.

“ Seventeen years ago,” he was thinking, “ he forfeited his life to the Society, and they gave it back to him. They will not pardon him this time. And who is to take the news to Natalie and the beautiful brave child ? Ah, what will she say ? My God, is there no happiness for any one in this world ? ”

He was greatly distressed ; but in his distress he became desperate. He would not look that way at all. He boldly justified himself for what he had done, and strove to regard it with satisfaction. What if both Lind and Beratinsky were to suffer ; had they not merited any punishment that might befall them ? Had they not compassed the destruction of an innocent man ? Would it have been better, then, that George Brand should have become the victim of an infamous conspiracy ? *Fiat justitia !*—no matter at what cost. Natalie must face the truth. Better that the guilty should suffer than the innocent. And he, Calabressa, for one, was not going to shirk any responsibility for what might happen. He had obeyed the orders of the Council. He had done his duty : that was enough.

He forced himself not to think of Natalie, and of the dismay and horror with which she would learn of one of the consequences of her appeal. This was a matter between men—

to be settled by men : if the consciences of women were tender, it could not be helped. Calabressa walked faster and faster, as it he were trying to get away from something that followed and annoyed him. He pretended to himself that he was deeply interested in a shop-window here or there ; occasionally he whistled ; he sung "Vado a Napoli in barchetta" with forced gayety ; he twisted his long white moustache, and then he made his way down to Brand's rooms.

Here he was also very gay.

"Now, my dear Monsieur Brand, to-day I have idleness : to-day I will talk to you ; yesterday I could not."

"Unfortunately," said Brand, "our positions are reversed now, for here is a letter from Lind wanting me to go up to Lisle Street. It seems Reitzei has had to go off into the country, leaving a lot of correspondence—"

"You are, then, on good terms with Lind ?" Calabressa interposed, quickly.

"Yes ; why not ?" said Brand, with a stare.

"I, also—I say, why not ? It is excellent. Then you have no time for my chatter ?" said Calabressa, carelessly regarding the open letter.

"At least you can tell me something about Natalie and her mother. Are they well ? What hotel are they at ?"

Calabressa laughed.

"Yes, yes, my friend Monsieur Brand, you say, 'Are they well ?' What you mean is, 'What has taken them to Naples ?' *Bien*, you are right to wonder ; you will not have to wonder long. A little patience ; you will hear something ; do not be surprised. And you have no message, for example, by way of reply to the letter I brought you ?"

"You are returning to Naples, then ?"

"To-night. I will take a message for you ; if you have no time now, send it to me at Charing Cross. Meanwhile, I take my leave."

Calabressa rose, but was persuaded to resume his seat.

"I see," said he, again laughing, "that you have a little time to hear about the two wanderers. Oh, they are in a good hotel, I assure you ; pretty rooms ; you look over to Capri ; quite near you the Castello dell' Ovo ; and underneath your windows the waves—a charming view ! And the little Nataluska, she has not lost her spirits : she says to me, 'Dear Mr. Calabressa, will you have the goodness to become my champion ?' I say to her, 'Against all the world !' 'Oh no,' she answers, 'not quite so much as that. It is a man who sells agates and pebbles and such things ; and no matter when I go out, he will

follow me, and thrust himself before me. Dear Mr. Calabressa, I do not want agates and pebbles, and he is more importunate than all the others put together ; and the servants of the hotel can do nothing with him.' Oh, I assure you, it would have made you laugh—her pretence of gravity ! I said nothing—not I ; what is the use of making serious promises over trifles ? But when I went out I encountered the gentleman with the agates and pebbles. 'Friend,' said I, 'a word with you. Skip, dance, be off with you to the steps of some other hotel ; your presence is not agreeable here.' 'Who are you ?' said he, naturally. 'No matter,' said I ; 'but do you wish to be presented with two dozen of the school-master's sweetmeats ?' 'Who are you ?' said he again. Then I took him by the ear and whispered something to him. By the blood of Saint Peter, Monsieur Brand, you should have heard the quick snap of his box, and seen the heels of him as he darted off like an antelope ! I tell you the grave-faced minx, that mocking Natalushka, who makes fun of old people like me—well, she shall not any more be troubled with agates and pebbles !"

"Then she is quite cheerful and happy ?" said Brand, somewhat wondering.

"Sometimes," Calabressa said, more gravely. "One cannot always be anxious ; one has glimpses of hope ; then the spirit rises ; the eyes laugh. You, for example, you do not seem much cast down ?"

Brand avoided his inquisitive look, and merely said,

"One must take things as one finds them. There is no use repining over what happens."

Calabressa now rose and took his cap ; then he laid it down on the table again.

"One moment before I go, my dear Monsieur Brand. I told you to expect news ; perhaps you will not understand. Shall I show you something to help ? Regard this : it is only a little trick ; but it may help you to understand when the news comes to you."

He took from his pocket a piece of white paper, square, and with apparently nothing on it. He laid it on the table, and produced a red pencil.

"May I trouble you for a small pair of scissors, my dear friend ?"

Brand stepped aside to a writing-desk, and brought him the scissors ; he was scarcely thinking of Calabressa at all ; he was thinking of the message he would send to Naples.

Calabressa slowly and carefully cut the piece of paper into four squares, and proceeded to fold these up. Brand looked

on, it is true, but with little interest ; and he certainly did not perceive that his companion had folded three of these pieces with the under side inward, the fourth with the upper side inward, while this had the rough edges turned in a different direction from the other three.

"Now, Mr. Brand," said Calabressa, calmly, "if one were drawing lots, for example, what more simple than this ? I take one of these pieces—you see there is nothing on it—I print a red cross with my pencil ; there, it is folded again, and they all go into my cap."

"Enough, Calabressa," Brand said, impatiently ; "you show me that you have questioned me closely enough. There is enough said about it."

"I ask your pardon, my dear friend, there is not," said Calabressa, politely ; "for this is what I have to say now : draw one of the pieces of paper."

Brand turned away.

"It is not a thing to be gone over again, I tell you ; I have had enough of it ; let it rest."

"It must not rest. I beg of you—my friend, I insist—"

He pressed the cap on him ; Brand, to get rid of him, drew one of the papers and tossed it on to the table. Calabressa took it up, opened it, and showed him the red cross.

"Yes, you are again unfortunate, my dear Monsieur Brand. Fate pursues you, does it not ? But wait one moment. Will you open the other three papers ?"

As Brand seemed impatient, Calabressa himself took them out and opened them singly before him. On each and all was the same red mark.

But now Brand was indifferent no longer

"What do you mean, Calabressa ?" he said, quickly.

"I mean," said Calabressa, regarding him, "that one might prepare a trick by which you would not have much chance of escape."

Brand caught him by the arm.

"Do you mean that these others—" He could not complete the sentence ; his brain was in a whirl ; was this why Natalie had sent him that strange message of hope ?

Calabressa released himself, and took his cap, and said,

"I can tell you nothing, my dear friend—nothing. My lips are sealed for the present. But surely one is permitted to show you a common little trick with bits of paper !"

"But you *must* tell me what you mean," said Brand, breathlessly, and with his face still somewhat pale. "You suggest there has been a trick. That is why you have come from

Naples? What do you know? What is about to happen? For God's sake, Calabressa, don't have any mystification about it: what is it that you know—that you suspect—that you have heard?"

"My dear friend," said Calabressa, with some anxiety, "perhaps I have been indiscreet. I know nothing: what can I know? But I show you a trick—if only to prepare you for any news—and you think it is very serious. Oh no; do not be too hopeful—do not think it is serious—think it was a foolish trick—"

And so, notwithstanding all that Brand could do to force some definite explanation from him, Calabressa succeeded in getting away, promising to carry to Natalie any message Brand might send in the evening; and as for Brand himself, it was now time for him to go up to Lisle Street, so that he had something else to think of than idle mystifications.

For this was how he took it in the end: Calabressa was whimsical, fantastic, mysterious; he had been playing with the notion that Brand had been entrapped into this service; he had succeeded in showing himself how it might have been done. The worst of it was—had he been putting vain hopes into the mind of Natalie? Was this the cause of her message? In the midst of all this bewildering uncertainty, Brand set himself to the work left unfinished by Reitzei, and found Ferdinand Lind as pleasant and friendly a colleague as ever.

But a few days after he was startled by being summoned back to Lisle Street, after he had gone home in the afternoon. He found Ferdinand Lind as calm and collected as usual, though he spoke in a hard, dry voice. He was then informed that Lind himself and Beratinsky were about to leave London for a time; that the Council wished Brand to conduct the business at Lisle Street as best he could in their absence; and that he was to summon to his aid such of the officers of the Society as he chose. He asked no explanations, and Lind vouchsafed none. There was something unusual in the expression of the man's face.

Well, Brand installed himself in Lisle Street, and got along as best he could with the assistance of Gathorne Edwards and one or two others. But not one of them, any more than himself, knew what had happened or was happening. No word or message of any kind came from Calabressa, or Lind, or the Society, or any one. Day after day Brand got through his work with patience, but without interest; only for the time being, these necessities of the hour beguiled him from

thinking of the hideous, inevitable thing that lay ahead in his life.

When news did come, it was sudden and terrible. One night he and Edwards were alone in the rooms in Lisle Street, when a letter, sent through a roundabout channel, was put into his hands. He opened it carelessly, glanced at the beginning of it, then he uttered an exclamation; then, as he read on, Edwards noticed that his companion's face was ghastly pale, even to his lips.

"Gracious heavens!—Edwards, read it!" he said, quite breathlessly. He dropped the letter on the table. There was no wild joy at his own deliverance in this man's face, there was terror rather; it was not of himself at all he was thinking, but of the death-agony of Natalie Lind when she should hear of her father's doom.

"Why, this is very good news, Brand," Edwards cried, wondering. "You are released from that affair—"

But then he read farther, and he, too, became agitated.

"What—what does it mean? Lind, Beratinsky, Reitzei accused of conspiracy—misusing the powers intrusted to them as officers of the Society—Reitzei acquitted on giving evidence—Lind and Beratinsky condemned!"

Edwards looked at his companion, aghast, and said,

"You know what the penalty is, Brand?"

The other nodded. Edwards returned to the letter, reading aloud, in detached scraps, his voice giving evidence of his astonishment and dismay.

"Beratinsky, allowed the option of undertaking the duty from which you are released, accepts—it is his only chance, I suppose—poor devil! what chance is it, after all?" He put the letter back on the table. "What is all this that has happened, Brand?"

Brand did not answer. He had risen to his feet; he stood like one bound with chains; there was suffering and an infinite pity in the haggard face.

"Why is not Natalie here?" he said; and it was strange that two men so different from each other as Brand and Calabressa should in such a crisis have had the same instinctive thought. The lives and fates of men were nothing; it was the heart of a girl that concerned them. "They will tell her—some of them over there—they will tell her suddenly that her father is condemned to die! Why is she—among—among strangers?"

He pulled out his watch hastily, but long ago the night-mail had left for Dover. At this moment the bell rung below,

and he started ; it was unusual for them to have a visitor at such an hour.

"It is only that drunken fool Kirski," Edwards said. "I asked him to come here to-night."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE TRIAL.

It was a dark, wet, and cold night when Calabressa felt his way down the gangway leading from the Admiralty Pier into the small Channel steamer that lay slightly rolling at her moorings. Most of the passengers who were already on board had got to leeward of the deck-cabins, and sat huddled up there, undistinguishable bundles of rugs. For a time he almost despaired of finding out Reitzei, but at last he was successful ; and he had to explain to this particular bundle of rugs that he had changed his mind, and would himself travel with him to Naples.

It was a dirty night in crossing, and both suffered considerably ; the difference being that, as soon as they got into the smooth waters of Calais harbor, Calabressa recovered himself directly, whereas Reitzei remained an almost inanimate heap of wrappings, and had to be assisted or shoved up the steep gangway into the glare of the officials' lamps. Then, as soon as he had got into a compartment of the railway-carriage, he rolled himself up in a corner, and sought to forget his sufferings in sleep.

Calabressa was walking up and down on the platform. At length the bell rung, and he was about to step into the compartment, when he found himself preceded by a lady.

"I beg your pardon, madame," said he, politely, "but it is a carriage for smokers."

"And if one wishes to smoke, one is permitted—is it not so?" said the stranger, cheerfully.

Calabressa at once held open the door for her, and then followed. These three had the compartment to themselves.

She was a young lady, good-looking, tall, bright-complexioned, with brown eyes that had plenty of fire in them, and a pleasant smile that showed brilliant teeth. Calabressa, sitting opposite her, judged that she was an Austrian, from the number of bags and knickknacks she had, all in red Russia leather, and from the number of trinkets she wore, mostly of

polished steel or silver. She opened a little tortoise-shell cigarette-case, took out a cigarette, and gracefully accepted the light that Calabressa offered her. By this time the train had started, and was thundering through the night.

The young lady was very frank and affable ; she talked to her companion opposite—Reitzei being fast asleep—about a great many things ; she lit cigarette after cigarette. She spoke of her husband moreover ; and complained that he should have to go and fight in some one else's quarrel. Why could not ladies who went to the tables at Monte Carlo keep their temper, that a perfectly neutral third person should be summoned to fight a duel on behalf of one of them ?

"You are going to rejoin him, then, madame ?" said Calabressa.

"Not at all," she said, laughing. "I have my own affairs."

After some time, she said, with quite a humorous smile,

"My dear sir, I hope I do not keep you from sleeping. But you are puzzled about me ; you think you have seen me before, but cannot tell where."

"There you are perfectly right, madame."

"Think of the day before yesterday. You were crossing in the steamer. You were so good as to suggest to a lady on board that nearer the centre vessel would be safer for her—"

He stared at her again. Could this be the same lady who, on the day that he crossed, was seated right at the stern of the steamer her brown hair flying about with the wind, her white teeth flashing as she laughed and joked with the sailors, her eyes full of life and merriment as she pitched up and down ? Calabressa, before the paroxysms of his woe overtook him, had had the bravery to go and remonstrate with this young lady, and to tell her she would be more comfortable nearer the middle of the boat ; but she had laughingly told him she was a sailor's daughter, and was not afraid of the sea. Well, this handsome young lady opposite certainly laughed like that other, but still—

"Oh," she said, "do I puzzle you with such a simple thing ? My hair was brown the day before yesterday, it is black to-day ; is that a sufficient disguise ? *Pardieu*, when I went to a music-hall in London that same night to see some stupid nonsense—bah ! such stupid nonsense I have never seen in the world—I went dressed as a man. Only for exercise, you perceive : one does not need disguises in London."

Calabressa was becoming more and more mystified, and she saw it, and her amusement increased.

"Come, my friend," she said, "you cannot deny that you also are political?"

"I, madame?" said Calabressa, with great innocence.

"Oh yes. And you are not on the side of the big battalions, eh?"

"I declare to you, madame—"

She glanced at Reitzei.

"Your friend sleeps sound. Come, shall I tell you something? You did not say a word, for example, when you stepped on shore, to a gentleman in a big cloak who had a lantern—"

"Madame, I beg of you!" he exclaimed, in a low voice, also glancing at Reitzei.

"What!" she said, laughing. "Then you have the honor of the acquaintance of my old friend Biard? The rogue, to take a post like that! Oh, I think my husband could speak more frankly with you; I can only guess."

"You are somewhat indiscreet, madame," said Calabressa, coldly.

"I indiscreet?" she said, flickering off the the ash of her cigarette with a finger of the small gloved hand. Then she said, with mock seriousness, "How can one be indiscreet with a friend of the good man Biard? Come, I will give you a lesson in sincerity. My husband is gone to fight a duel, I told you; yes, but his enemy is a St. Petersburg general who belonged to the Third Section. They should not let Russians play at Monte Carlo; it is so easy to pick a quarrel with them. And now about myself; you want to know what I am—what I am about. Ah, I perceive it, monsieur. Well, this time, on the other hand, I shall be discreet. But if you hear of something within a few weeks—if the whole of the world begins to chatter about it—and you say, 'Well, that woman had pluck'—then you can think of our little conversation during the night. We must be getting near Amiens, is it not so?"

She took from her traveling-bag a small apparatus for showering eau-de-cologne in spray, and with this sprinkled her forehead; afterward removing the drops with a soft sponge, and smoothing her rebellious black hair. Then she took out a tiny flask and cup of silver.

"Permit me, monsieur, to give you a little cognac, after so many cigarettes. I fear you have only been smoking to keep me company—"

"A thousand thanks, madame!" said Calabressa, who certainly did not refuse. She took none herself; indeed, she

had just time to put her bags in order again when the train slowed into Amiens station ; and she, bidding her bewildered and bewitched companion a most courteous farewell, got out and departed.

Calabressa himself soon fell asleep, and did not wake until they were near Paris. By this time the bundle of rugs in the corner had begun to show signs of animation.

"Well, friend Reitzei you have had a good sleep," said Calabressa, yawning, and stretching his arms.

"I have slept a little."

"You have slept all night—what more? What do you know, for example, of the young lady who was in the carriage?"

"I saw her come in," Reitzei said, indifferently, "and I heard you talking once or twice. What was she?"

"There you ask me a pretty question. My belief is that she was either one of those Nihilist madwomen, or else the devil himself in a new shape. At any rate, she had some good cognac."

"I should like some coffee now, Signor Calabressa ; and you?"

"I would not refuse it."

Indeed, during all this journey to Naples, Calabressa and his companion talked much more of the commonplace incidents and wants of travel than of the graver matters that lay before them. Calabressa was especially resolute in doing so. He did not like to look ahead. He kept reminding himself that he was simply the agent of the Council ; he was carrying out their behests ; the consequences were for others to deal with. He had fulfilled his commission ; he had procured sufficient proof of the suspected conspiracy ; if evil-doers were to be punished, was he responsible? *Fiat justitia!* he kept repeating to himself. He was answerable to the Council alone. He had done his duty.

But from time to time—and especially when they were travelling at night, and he was awake—a haunting dread possessed him. How should he appear before these two women in Naples? His old friend Natalie Berezolyi had been grievously wronged ; she had suffered through long years ; but a wife forgets much when her husband is about to die. And a daughter? Lind had been an affectionate father enough to this girl ; these two had been companions all her lifetime ; recent incidents would surely be forgotten in her terror over the fact that it was her own appeal to the Council that had wrought her father's death. And then he,

Calabressa, what could he say? It was through him she had invoked these unknown powers; it was his counsel that had taken her to Naples; and he was the immediate instrument that would produce this tragic end.

He would not think of it. At the various places where they stopped he worried about food and drink, and angrily haggled about hotel-bills: he read innumerable stupid little newspapers from morning till night; he smoked Reitzei nearly blind. At last they reached Naples.

Within an hour after their arrival Calabressa, alone, was in Tommaso's wine-vaults talking to the ghoulish occupant. A bell rung, faint and muffled, in the distance; he passed to the back of the vaults, and lit a candle that Tommaso handed him; then he followed what seemed, from the rumble overhead, some kind of subterranean corridor. But at the end of this long sub-way he began to ascend; then he reached some steps; finally, he was on an ordinary staircase, with daylight around him, and above him a landing with two doors, both shut.

Opening one of these doors, after having knocked thrice, he entered a large, bare chamber which was occupied by three men, all seated at a table which was covered with papers. One of them, Von Zoesch, rose.

"That is good; that is very well settled," he said to the other two. "It is a good piece of work. Now here is this English business, and the report of our wily friend, Calabressa. What is it, Calabressa? We had your telegram; we have sent for Lind and Beratinsky; what more?"

"Excellency, I have fulfilled your commission, I hope with judgment," Calabressa said, his cap in his hand. "I believe it is clear that the Englishman had that duty put upon him by fraudulent means."

"It is a pity if it be so; it will cost us some further trouble, and we have other things to think about at present." Then he added, lightly, "but it will please your young lady friend, Calabressa. Well?"

"Excellency, you forget it may not quite so well please her if it is found that her father was in the conspiracy," said Calabressa, submissively.

"Why not?" answered the bluff, tall soldier. "However, to the point, Calabressa. What have you discovered? and your proofs?"

"I have none, your Excellency; but I have brought with me one of the four in the ballot who is willing to confess. Why is he willing to confess?" said Calabressa, with a little

triumphant smile ; "because he thinks the gentlemen of the Council know already."

"And you have frightened the poor devil, no doubt," said Von Zoesch, laughing.

"I have on the contrary, assured him of pardon," said Calabressa, gravely. It is within the powers you gave me, Excellency. I have pledged my honor—"

"Oh yes, yes ; very well. But do you mean to tell us, my good Calabressa," said this tall man, speaking more seriously, "that you have proof of these three—Lind, Beratinsky, Reitzei—having combined to impose on the Englishman ? Not Lind, surely ? Perhaps the other two—"

"Your Excellency, it is for you to investigate further and determine. I will tell you how I proceeded. I went to the Englishman, and got minute particulars of what occurred. I formed my own little story, my guess, my theory. I got hold of Reitzei, and hinted that it was all known. On my faith, he never thought of denying anything, he was so frightened ! But regard this, Excellency ; I know nothing. I can give you the Englishman's account ; then, if you get that of Reitzei, and the two correspond, it is a good proof that Reitzei is not lying in his confession. It is for you to examine him, Excellency."

"No, it is not for me," the ruddy-faced soldier-looking man said, and then he turned to his two companions. The one was the Secretary Granaglia : the other was a broad-shouldered, elderly man, with strikingly handsome features of the modern Greek type, a pallid, wax-like complexion, and thoughtful, impenetrable eyes. "Brother Conventzi, I withdraw from this affair. I leave it in hands of the Council ; one of the accused was in former days my friend ; it is not right that I should interfere."

"And I also, Excellency," said Calabressa, eagerly. "I have fulfilled my commission ; may not I retire now also ?"

"Brother Granaglia will take down your report in writing ; then you are free, my Calabressa. But you will take the summons of the Council to your friend Reitzei ; I suppose he will have to be examined before the others arrive."

And so it came about that neither the General von Zoesch nor Calabressa was present when the trial, if trial it could be called, took place. There were no formalities. In this same big bare room seven members of the Council sat at the table, Brother Conventz presiding, the Secretary Granaglia at the foot, with writing-materials before him. Ferdinand Lind and Beratinsky stood between them and the side-wall

apparently impassive. Reitzei was nearer the window, pallid, uneasy, his eyes wandering about the room, but avoiding the place where his former colleagues stood.

The President briefly stated the accusation against them, and read Reitzei's account of his share in what had taken place. He asked if they had anything to deny or to explain.

Beratsinsky was the first to speak.

"Illustrious Brethren of the Council," he began, as if with some set speech; but his color suddenly forsook him, and he halted and looked helplessly round. Then he said, wildly, "I declare that I am innocent—I say that I am innocent! I never should have thought of it, gentlemen. It was Lind's suggestion; he wished to get rid of the man; I declare I had nothing to gain. Gentlemen, judge for yourselves: what had I to gain?"

He looked from one to the other; the grave faces were mostly regarding Granaglia, who was slowly and carefully putting the words down.

Then Lind spoke, clearly and coldly:

"I have nothing to deny. What I did was done in the interests of the Society. My reward for my long services is that I am haled here like a pickpocket. It is the second time; it will be the last. I have done, now, with the labor of my life. You can reap the fruits of it. Do with me what you please."

The President rose.

"The gentlemen may now retire; the decision of the Council will be communicated to them hereafter."

A bell rung; Tommaso appeared; Lind and Beratsinsky were conducted down the stairs and through the dark corridor. In a few seconds Tommaso returned, and performed a like office for Reitzei.

The deliberation of the Council were but of short duration. The guilt of the accused was clear; and clear and positive was the penalty prescribed by the articles of the Society. But, in consideration of the fact that Beratsinsky had been led into this affair by Lind, it was resolved to offer him the alternative of his taking over the service from which Brand was released. This afforded but a poor chance of escape, but Beratsinsky was in a desperate position. That same evening he accepted; and the Secretary Granaglia was forthwith ordered to report the result of these proceedings to England, and give certain instructions as to the further conduct of business there.

The Secretary Granaglia performed this task with his

usual equanimity. He was merely a machine registering the decrees of the Council; it was no affair of his to be concerned about the fate of Ferdinand Lind; he had even forgotten the existence of the two women who had been patiently waiting day after day at that hotel, alternately hoping and fearing to learn what had occurred.

CHAPTER LVI.

PUT TO THE PROOF.

It was not at all likely that, at such a crisis, George Brand should pay much attention to the man Kirski, who was now ushered into the room. He left Edwards to deal with him. In any case he could not have understood a word they were saying, except through the interpretation of Edwards, and that was a tedious process. He had other things to think of.

Edwards was in a somewhat nervous and excited condition after hearing this strange news, and he grew both impatient and angry when he saw that Kirski was again half dazed with drink.

"Yes, I thought so!" he exclaimed, looking as fierce as the mild student-face permitted. "This is why you are not at the shop when I called to-day. What do you mean by it? What has become of your promises?"

"Little father, I have great trouble," said the man, humbly.

"You! You in trouble!" said Edwards, angrily. "You do not know what trouble is. You have everything in the world you could wish for. You have good friends, as much employment as you can want, fair wages, and a comfortable home. If your wife ran away from you, isn't it a good ridance? And then, instead of setting about your work like a good citizen, you think of nothing but murdering a man who is as far away from you as the man in the moon, and then you take to drinking, and become a nuisance to every one."

"Little father, I have many troubles, and I wish to forget."

"Your troubles!" said Edwards, though his anger was a little bit assumed: he wished to frighten the man into better ways. "What are your troubles? Think of that beautiful lady you are always talking about, who interested herself in you—the bigger fool she!—think of her trouble when she

knows that her father is to die ; and for what ? Because he was not obedient to the laws of the Society. And he is punished with death ; and you, have you been obedient ? What has become of your promises to me ? ”

The man before him seemed at this moment to arouse himself. He answered nothing to the reproaches hurled at him ; but said, with a glance of eager interest in the sunken eyes,

“ Is she in great trouble, little father ? ”

This gleam of intelligence rather startled Edwards. He had been merely scolding a half-drunken poor devil, and had been incautious as to what he said. He continued, with greater discretion,

“ Would she have her troubles made any the less if she knew how you were behaving ? She was interested in you ; many a time she asked about you — ”

“ Yes, yes,” the man said, slowly ; and he was twisting about the cap that he held in his hand.

“ And she gave you her portrait. Well, I am glad you knew you were not fit to retain such a gift. A young lady like that does not give her portrait to be taken into public-houses — ”

“ No more—do not say any more, little father,” Kirski said, though in the same humble way. “ It is useless.”

“ Useless ? ”

“ I will not go back to any public-house—never.”

“ So you said to me four days ago,” Edwards answered.

“ This time it is true,” he said, though he did not lift his bleared eyes. “ To-morrow I will take back the portrait, little father ; it shall remain with me, in my room. I do not go back to any public-house, I shall be no more trouble.” Then he said, timidly raising his eyes, “ Does she weep—that beautiful one ? ”

“ Yes, no doubt,” said Edwards, hastily, and in some confusion. “ Is it not natural ? But you must not say a word about it ; it is a secret. Think of it, and what one has to suffer in this world, and then ask yourself if you will add to the trouble of one who has been so kind to you. Now do I understand you aright ? Is it a definite promise this time ? ”

“ This time, yes, little father. You will have no more need to complain of me, I will not add to any one’s trouble. To-morrow—no, to-night I take back the portrait ; it is sacred ; I will not add to any one’s trouble.”

There was something strange about the man’s manner, but Edwards put it down to the effects of drink, and was chiefly

concerned in impressing on the dazed intelligence before him the responsibility of the promises he had given.

"To-morrow, then, at nine you are at the shop."

"Assuredly, if you wish it, little father."

"Remember, it is the last chance your master will give you. He is very kind to give you this chance. To-morrow you begin a new course of conduct; and when the young lady comes back I will tell her of it."

"I will not add to her troubles, little father; you may be sure of it this time."

When he had gone, Brand turned to his companion. He still held that letter in his hands. His face, that had grown somewhat haggard of late, was even paler than usual.

"I suppose I ought to feel very glad, Edwards," he said. "This is a reprieve, don't you see, so far as I am concerned. And yet I can't realize it; I don't seem to care about it; all the bitterness was over—"

"You are too bewildered yet, Brand—no wonder."

"If only the girl and her mother were over here!" he said; and then he added, with a quick instinct of fear, "What will she say to me? When she appealed to the Council, surely she could not have imagined that the result would be her father's death. But now that she finds it so—when she finds that, in order to rescue me, she has sacrificed him—"

He could not complete the sentence.

"But he has richly deserved it," said Edwards.

"That is not what she will look to," he said. "Edwards," he added, presently, "I am going home now. This place stifles me. I hate the look of it. That table is where they played their little sleight-of-hand business; and oh! the bravery of the one and the indifference of the other, and Lind's solemn exposition of duty and obedience, and all the rest of it! Well, what will be the result when this pretty story becomes known? Rascality among the very foremost officers of the Society! what are all those people who have recently joined us, who are thinking of joining us, likely to say? Are these your high-priests? Are these the apostles of self-sacrifice, and all the virtues?"

"It is bad enough, but not irreparable," said Edwards, calmly. "If a member here or there falls out, the association remains; if one of its high officers betrays his trust, you see how swift and terrible the punishment is."

"I do not," said Brand. "I see that the paper decree is swift enough, but what about the execution of it? Have the Council a body of executioners?"

"I don't know about that," said Edwards, simply; "but I know that when I was in Naples with Calabressa, I heard of the fate of several against whom decrees had been pronounced; and I know that in every instance they anticipated their own fate; the horror of being continually on the watch was too much for them. You may depend on it, that is what Lind will do. He is a proud man. He will not go slinking about, afraid at every street-corner of the knife of the Little Chaffinch, or some other of those Cammorra fellows—"

"Edwards," said Brand, hastily, "there is a taint of blood—of treachery—about this whole affair that sickens me. It terrifies me when I think of what lies ahead. I—I think I have already tasted death, and the taste is still bitter in the mouth. I must get into the fresh air."

Edwards got his coat and hat, and followed. He saw that his companion was strangely excited.

"If all this work—if all we have been looking forward to—were to turn out to be a delusion," Brand said, hurriedly, when they had got into the dark clear night outside, "that would be worse than the suicide of Ferdinand Lind or the disappearance of Beratinsky. If this is to be the end—if these are our companions—"

"But how can you suggest such a thing?" Edwards protested. "Your imagination is filled with blackness, Brand. You are disturbed, shocked, afraid. Why, who are your colleagues? What do you think of—" Here he mentioned a whole string of names, some of them those of well-known Englishmen. "Do you accuse them of treachery? Have you not perfect confidence in them? Have they not perfect confidence in the work we are all pledged to?"

But he could not shake off this horrible feeling. He wished to be alone, to fight with it; he did not even think of going to Lord Evelyn; perhaps it was now too late. Shortly afterward he bade Edwards good-night, and made his way to his rooms at the foot of Buckingham Street.

Waters had left the lights low; he did not turn them up. Outside lay the black night-world of London, hushed and silent, with its thousand golden points of fire. He was glad to be alone.

And yet an unknown feeling of dread was upon him. It seemed as if now for the first time he realized what a terrible destiny had nearly been his; and that his escape, so far from rendering him joyful, had left him still trembling and horrified. Hitherto his pride had conquered. Even as he had undertaking that duty, it was his pride that had kept him out-

wardly calm and indifferent. He would not show fear, he would not even show repugnance, before these men. And it was pride, too, that had taught him at length and successfully to crush down certain vague rebellions of conscience. He would not go back from his oath. He would not go back from the promise to which Natalie's ring bound him. He would go through with this thing, and bid farewell to life; further than that no one could have demands on him.

But the sudden release from this dire pressure of will left his nerves somewhat unstrung. For the mere sake of companionship he would like to have taken Natalie's hand, to have heard her voice: that would have assured him, and given him courage. He knew not what dangers encompassed her, what agony she might not be suffering. And the night did not answer these sudden, wavering, confused questionings; the darkness outside was as silent as the grave.

Then a deeper gloom, almost touching despair, fell upon him. He saw in all those companions of his only so many dupes; the great hope of his life left him, the future became blank. He began to persuade himself that he had only toyed with that new-found faith; that it was the desperation of *ennui*, not a true hope, that had drawn him into this work; that henceforth he would have no right to call upon others to join in a vain undertaking. If such things as had just occurred were possible in this organization, with all its lofty aims and professions—if there was to be a background of assassination and conspiracy—why, this dream must go as others had done. Then what remained to him in life? He almost wished he had been allowed to go forward to this climax unknowing; to have gone with his heart still filled with faith; to be assured until the last moment that Natalie would remember how he had fulfilled his promise to her.

It was a dark night for him, within and without. But as he sat there at the window, or walked up and down, wrestling with these demons of doubt and despair, a dull blue light gradually filled the sky outside; the orange stars on the bridges grew less intense; the broad river became visible in the dusk. Then by-and-by the dull blue cleared into a pale steel-gray, and the forms of the boats could be made out, anchored in the stream there: these were the first indications of the coming dawn.

Somehow or other he ceased these restless paces of his, and was attracted to the window, though he gazed but absently on the slow change taking place outside—the world-old wonder of the new day rising in the east. Up into that

steely-gray glides a soft and luminous saffron-brown ; it spreads and widens ; against it the far dome of St. Paul's becomes a beautiful velvet-purple. A planet, that had been golden when it was in the dusk near the horizon, has now sailed up into the higher heaven, and shines a clear silver point. And now, listen ! the hushed and muffled sounds in the silence ; the great city is awakening from its sleep—there is the bark of a dog—the rumble of a cart is heard. And still that saffron glow spreads and kindles in the east, and the dome of St. Paul's is richer in hue than ever ; the river between the black-gray bridges, shines now with a cold light, and the gas-lamps have grown pale. And then the final flood of glory wells up in the eastern skies, and all around him the higher buildings catch here and there a swift golden gleam : the sunrise is declared ; there is a new day born for the sons and daughters of men.

The night had fled, and with it the hideous phantoms of the night. It seemed to him that he had escaped from the grave, and that he was only now shaking off the horror of it. Look at the beautiful, clear colors without ; listen to the hum of the city awakening to all its cheerful activities ; the new day has brought with it new desires, new hopes. He threw open the windows. The morning air was cold and sweet—the sparrows were beginning to chirp in the garden-plots below. Surely that black night was over and gone.

If only he could see Natalie for one moment, to assure her that he had succumbed but once, and for the last time, to despair. It was a confession he was bound to make ; it would not lessen her trust in him. For now all through his soul a sweet, clear voice was ringing : it was the song the sunrise had brought him ; it was the voice of Natalie herself, with all its proud pathos and fervor, as he had heard it in the olden days :

“ A little time we gain from time
To set our seasons in some chime,
For harsh or sweet, or loud or low,
With seasons played out long ago—
And souls that in their time and prime
Took part with summer or with snow,
Lived abject lives out or sublime,
And had there chance of seed to sow
For service or disservice done
To those days dead and this their son.

“ A little time that we may fill
Or with such good works or such ill
As loose the bonds or make them strong,
Wherein all manhood suffers wrong.

By rose-hung river and light-foot rill
 There are who rest not ; who think long
 Till they discern, as from a hill,
 At the sun's hour of morning song,
 Known of souls only, and those souls free,
 The sacred spaces of the sea."

Surely it was still for him and her together to stand on some such height, hand-in-hand, and watch the sunrise come over the sea and awakening world. They would forget the phantoms of the night, and the traitors gone down to Erubus ; perhaps, for this new life together, they might seek a new clime. There was work for them still ; and faith, and hope, and the constant assurance of love : the future might perchance be all the more beautiful because of these dark perils of the past.

As he lay thus communing with himself, the light shining in on his haggard face, Waters came into the room, and was greatly concerned to find that not only had his master not been to bed, but that the supper left out for him the night before had not been touched. Brand rose, without betraying any impatience over his attendant's pertinacious inquiries and remonstrances. He went and got writing materials, and wrote as follows :

"DEAR EVELYN,—If you could go over to Naples for me—at once—I would take it as a great favor. I cannot go myself. Whether or not, come to see me at Lisle Street to-day, by twelve.

"Yours,

G. B."

"Take this to Lord Evelyn, Waters ; and if he is up get an answer."

"But your breakfast, sir. God bless me—"

"Never mind breakfast. I am going to lie down for an hour or two now ; I have had some business to think over. Let me have some breakfast about eleven—when I ring."

"Very well, sir."

That was his phrase—he had had some business to think over. But it seemed to him, as he went into the adjacent room, that that night he had passed through worse than the bitterness of death.

CHAPTER LV.

CONGRATULATIONS.

THE Secretary Granaglia, the business of the Council being over, carried the news to Von Zoesch. It was almost dark when he made his way up the steep little terraces in the garden of the villa at Posilipo. He found the tall general seated at the entrance to the grotto-like retreat, smoking a cigar in the dusk.

"You are late, Granaglia," he said.

"I had some difficulty in coming here," said the little man with the sallow face and the tired eyes. "The police are busy, or pretending to be. The Commendatore tells me that Zaccatelli has been stirring them up."

"Zaccatelli!" said Von Zoesch, with a laugh. "It will soon be time now for Zaccatelli to come down from his perch. Well, now, what is the result?"

Granaglia briefly recounted what had occurred: the other manifested no surprise.

"So this is the end of the Lind episode," he said, thoughtfully. "It is a pity that so able a man should be thrown away. He has worked well; I know of no one who will fill his place; but that must be seen to at once, Granaglia. How long have they given him?"

"A month, your Excellency. He wishes to go back to England to put his affairs in order. He has a firm nerve."

"He was a good-looking man when he was young," said Von Zoesch, apparently to himself. Then he added: "This Beratirsky, to whom the Zaccatelli affair has been transferred—what do you think of him? There must be no bungling, Granaglia. What do you think of him—is he to be trusted?"

"Your Excellency, if I were to give you my own impression, I should say not in the least. He accepts this service—why? Because he is otherwise lost for certain, and here is a chance: it is perhaps better than nothing. But he does not go forward with any conviction of duty: what is he thinking but of his chance of running away?"

"And perhaps running away beforehand, for example?"

"Oh no, your Excellency; at least, that has been provided for. Caprone and the brother of Caprone will wait upon him until the thing is over; and what is more, he will receive a hint that these two humble attendants of his are keeping an eye on him."

"Caprone dare not go to Rome."

"He is ready to go anywhere. They might as well try to lay hands on a ghost."

Von Zoesch rose, and stretched his huge frame, and yawned.

"So this is the end of the episode Lind," he said, idly. "It is a pity. But if a man plays a risky game and loses, he must pay. Perhaps the warning will be wholesome, Granaglia. Our friends must understand that our laws are not laid down for nothing, and that we are not afraid to punish offenders, even if these be among ourselves. I suppose there is nothing further to be done to-night?"

"I would ask your Excellency to remain here for a little time yet," said the Secretary.

"Are they coming so near? We must get Calabressa to procure some of them a dozen or two on board the schooner. However—"

He sat down again, and lit another cigar.

"We must pay Calabressa a compliment, Granaglia; it was well done—very clever; it has all turned out just as he imagined; it is not the first time he has done us good service, with all his volubility. Oh yes; the rascal knows when to hold his tongue. At this moment, for example, he refuses to open his lips.

"Pardon, your Excellency; but I do not understand you."

The general laughed a little, and continued talking—it was one way of passing the time.

"It is a good joke enough. The wily old Calabressa saw pretty clearly what the decision of the Council would be, and so he comes to me and entreats me to be the bearer of the news to Madame Lind and her daughter. Oh yes; it is good news, this deliverance of the Englishman; Madame Lind is an old friend of mine; she and her daughter will be grateful. But you perceive, Granaglia, that what the cunning old dog was determined to avoid was the reporting to Madame Lind that her husband had been sentenced. That was no part of the original programme. And now Calabressa holds his mouth shut; he keeps out of the way; it is left for me to go and inform the mother and daughter.

His voice became more serious.

"The devil take it, it is no pleasant task at all! One is never sure how the brain of a woman will work; you start the engine, but it may plunge back the wrong way and strike you. Calabressa is afraid. The fox is hiding in some hole until it is all over."

"Cannot I be of some service, your Excellency?" the Secretary said.

"No, no; but I thank you, friend Granaglia. It is a delicate matter; it must be approached with circumspection; and I, as an old acquaintance of Madame Lind, ought not to shirk the duty."

Apparently, it was not Calabressa only who had some dread of the difficulties of news-bearer.

"It is impossible for your Excellency to go near the hotel at present," said the Secretary, promptly.

But his chief refused to accept this offered means of escape.

"That is true, but it is not a difficulty. To-night, friend Granaglia, you will send a message to the hotel, bidding them be at the Villa Odelschalchi to-morrow morning at eleven—you understand?"

"Certainly, your Excellency."

"Then I will meet them, and take the risk. Everything must be settled off at once: we have wasted too much time over this affair, Granaglia. When does the Genoa Council meet?"

"On the Seventh."

"To-morrow you must issue the summonses. Come, Granaglia, let us be stirring; it is cold. Where does Brother Conventz sleep to-night?"

"On board the schooner, your Excellency."

"I also. To-morrow, at eleven, you will be at Portici; to-night you will send the message to the ladies at the hotel; and also, if you can, find out where that rogue Calabressa is hiding."

That was the last of their talking. There was some locking up inside; then they passed down through the dark garden and out into the road. There was no one visible. They walked on in silence.

Punctually at eleven the next morning Natalie and her mother appeared at the iron gates of the Villa Odelschalchi and rang the bell. The porter appeared, admitted them, and then turned to the great white staircase, which Granaglia was at that moment seen to be descending.

"Will the ladies have the goodness to step into the garden?" said the Secretary, with grave courtesy. "General von Zoesch will be with them directly."

He accompanied them as far as the top of the terrace, and then bowed and withdrew.

If Natalie Lind was agitated now, it was not with fear. There was a fresh animation of color in her cheek; her

eyes were brilliant and excited ; she spoke in low, eager whispers.

" Oh, I know what he is coming to tell us, mother—you need not be afraid : I shall see it in his face before he comes near—I think I shall be able to hear it in the sound of his steps. Have courage, mother ! why do you tremble so ? Remember what Calabressa said. They are so powerful they can do everything ; and you and the General von Zoesch old friends, too. Look at this, mother : do you see what I have brought with me ? "

She opened her purse—her fingers were certainly a little nervous—and showed her mother a folded-up telegraph form.

" I am going to telegraph to him, mother ; surely it is from me he should hear the news first. And then he might come here, mother, to go back with us : you will rest a few days after so much anxiety. "

" I hope, my darling, it will all turn out well, " said the mother, turning quickly as she heard footsteps.

The next second Von Zoesch appeared, his face red with embarrassment ; but still Natalie with her first swift glance saw that his eyes were smiling and friendly, and her heart leaped up with a bound.

" My dear young lady, " said he, taking her hand, " forgive me for making such a peremptory appointment— "

" But you bring good news ? " she said, breathlessly. " Oh, sir, I can see that you have succeeded—yes, yes—the danger is removed—you have saved him ! "

" My dear young lady, " said he, smiling, but still greatly embarrassed, " it is my good fortune to be able to congratulate you. Ah, I thought that would bring some brightness to your eyes— "

She raised his hand, and kissed it twice passionately.

" Mother, " she said, in a wild, joyful way, " will you not thank him for me ? I do not know what I am saying—and then— "

The general had turned to her mother. Natalie quickly took out the telegraph-form, unfolded it, knelt down and put it on the garden-seat, and with trembling fingers wrote her message : "*You are saved ! Come to us at once ; my mother and I wait here for you ;* " that was the substance of it. Then she rose, and for a second or two stood irresolute, silent, and shamefaced. Happily no one had noticed her. These two had gone forward, and were talking together in a low voice. She did not join them ; she could not have spoken then, her heart was throbbing so violently with its newly-found joy.

" Stefan, " said the mother—and there was a pleasant light

in her sad eyes too—"I shall never forget the gratitude we owe you. I have nothing else to regard now but my child's happiness. You have saved her life to her."

"Yes, yes," he said, in stammering haste, "I am glad the child is happy. It would be a pity, at her time of life, and such a beautiful, brave young lady—yes, it would be a pity if she were to suffer: I am very glad. But there is another side to the question, Natalie; it refers to you. I have not such good news for you—that is, it depends on how you take it; but it is not good news—it will trouble you—only, it was inevitable—"

"What do you mean?" she said, calmly.

"Your husband," he said, regarding her somewhat anxiously.

"Yes," she said, without betraying any emotion.

"Well, you understand, we had not the power to release your English friend unless there had been injustice—or worse—in his being appointed. There was. More than that, it was very nearly a repetition of the old story. Your husband was again implicated."

She merely looked at him, waiting for him to continue.

"And the Council," he said, more embarrassed than ever, "had to try him for his complicity. He was tried and—condemned."

"To what?" she said, quite calmly.

"You must know, Natalie. He loses his life!"

She turned very pale.

"It was not so before," she managed to say, though her breath came and went quickly.

"It was; but then he was pardoned. This time there is no hope."

She stood silent for a second or two; then she said, regarding him with a sad look,

"You think me heartless, Stefan. You think I ought to be overwhelmed with grief. But—but I have been kept from my child for seventeen years. I have lived with the threat of the betrayal of my father hanging over me. The affection of a wife cannot endure everything. Still, I am—sorry—"

Her eyes were cast down, and they slowly filled with tears. Von Zoesch breathed more freely. He was eagerly explaining to her how this result had become inevitable—how he himself had had no participation in it, and so forth—when Natalie Lind stepped quickly up to them, looking from the one to the other. She saw something was wrong.

"Mother, what is it?" she said, in vague fear. She turned to Von Zoesch. "Oh, sir, if there is something you have

not told me—if there is trouble—why was it not to me that you spoke?”

She took hold of her mother's hand.

“Mother, what is it?”

“My dear young lady,” said Von Zoesch, interposing, “you know that life is made up of both bitter and sweet—”

“I wish to know, signore,” she said, proudly, “what it is you have told my mother. If there is trouble, it is for her daughter to share it.”

“Well, then, dear young lady, I will tell you,” he said, “though it will grieve you also. I must explain to you. You cannot suppose that the happy news I deliver to you was the result of the will of any one man, or number of men. No. It was the result of the application of law and justice. Your—sweetheart, shall I call him?—was intrusted with a grave duty, which would most probably have cost him his life. In the ordinary way, no one could have released him from it, however much certain friends of yours here might have been interested in you, and grieved to see you unhappy. But there was this possibility—it was even a probability—that he had been selected for this service unfairly. Then, no doubt, if that could be proved, he ought to be released.”

“Yes, yes,” she said, impatiently.

“That was proved. Unfortunately, I have to tell you that among those convicted of this conspiracy was your father. Well, the laws of our association are strict—they are even terrible where a delinquent is in a position of high responsibility. My dear young lady, I must tell you the truth: your father has been adjudged guilty—and—and the punishment is—death!”

She uttered a quick, short cry of alarm, and turned with frightened eyes to her mother.

“Mother, is it true? is it true?”

The mother did not answer; she had clasped her trembling hands. Then the girl turned; there was a proud passion in her voice.

“Oh, sir, what tiger is there among you that is so athirst for blood? You save one man's life—after intercession and prayer you save one man's life—only to seize on that of another. And it is to me—it is to me, his daughter—that you come with congratulations! I am only a child; I am to be pleased: you speak of a sweetheart; but you do not tell me that you are about to murder my father! You give me my lover; in exchange you take my father's life. Is there a wo-

man in all the world so despicable as to accept her happiness at such a cost?"

Involuntarily she crushed up the telegram she held in her hand and threw it away from her.

"It is not I, at all events," she exclaimed. "Oh, signore, you should not have mocked me with your congratulations. That is not the happiness you should offer to a daughter. But you have not killed him yet—there is time; let things be as they were; that is what my sweetheart, as you call him, will say; he and I are not afraid to suffer. Surely, rather that, than that he should marry a girl so heartless and cowardly as to purchase her happiness at the cost of her father's life?"

"My dear young lady," he said, with a great pity and concern in his face, "I can assure you what you think of is impossible. What is done cannot be undone."

Her proud indignation now gave way to terror.

"Oh no, signore, you cannot mean that! I cannot believe it! You have saved one man—oh, signore, for the love of Heaven, this other also! Have pity! How can I live, if I know that I have killed my father?"

He took both her hands in his, and strove to soothe down her wild terror and dismay. He declared to her she had nothing to do with it, no more than himself; that her father had been tried by his colleagues; that if he had not been, a fearful act of treachery would have been committed. She listened, or appeared to listen; but her lips were pale; her eyes had a strange look in them; she was breathless.

"Calabressa said they were all-powerful," she interrupted suddenly. "But are they all-powerful to slay only? Oh no, I cannot believe it! I will go to them; it cannot be too late; I will say to them that I would rather have died than appealed to them if I had known that this was to be the terrible result. And Calabressa—why did he not warn me? Or is he one of the blood-thirsty ones also—one of the tigers that crouch in the dark? Oh, signore, if they are all-powerful, they are all-powerful to pardon. May I not go to themselves?"

"It would be useless, my dear signorina," said Von Zoesch, with deep compassion in his voice. "I am sorry to grieve you, but justice has been done, and the decision is past recall. And do not blame poor old Calabressa—"

At this moment the bell of the outer gate rang, echoing through the empty house, and he started somewhat.

"Come, child," said her mother. "We have taken up too much of your time, Stefan. I wish there had been no drawback to your good news."

"At the present moment," he said, glancing somewhat anxiously toward the building, "I cannot ask you to stay, Natalie; but on some other occasion, and as soon as you please, I will give you any information you may wish. Remember, you have good friends here."

Natalie suffered herself to be led away. She seemed too horror-stricken to be able to speak. Von Zoesch accompanied them only to the terrace, and there bade them good-bye. Granaglia was waiting to show them to the gate. A few moments afterward they were in their carriage, returning to Naples.

They sat silent for some time, the mother regarding her daughter anxiously.

"Natalushka, what are you thinking of?"

The girl started: her eyes were filled with a haunting fear, as if she had just seen some terrible thing. And yet she spoke slowly and sadly and wistfully.

"I was thinking, mother, that perhaps it was not so hard to be condemned to die; for then there would come an end to one's suffering. And I was wondering whether there had been many women in the world who had to accuse themselves of taking a part in bringing about their own father's death. Oh, I hope not—I hope not!"

A second afterward she added, with more than the bitterness of tears in her trembling voice, "And—and I was thinking of General von Zoesch's congratulations, mother."

CHAPTER LVI.

A COMMISSION.

LORD EVELYN obeyed his friend's summons in considerable anxiety, if not even alarm; for he made no doubt that it had some connection with that mysterious undertaking to which Brand was pledged; but when he reached Lisle Street, and was shown into the larger room, no very serious business seemed going forward. Two or three of the best-known to him among the English members of the Society were present, grouped round a certain Irish M. P., who, with twinkling eyes but otherwise grave face, was describing the makeshifts of some provincial manager or other who could not pay his company their weekly salary. To the further sur-

prise of the new-comer, also, Mr. Lind was absent ; his chair was occupied by Gathorne Edwards.

He was asked to go into an inner room ; and there he found Brand, looking much more like himself than he had done for some time back.

"It is awfully kind of you, Evelyn, to come at once. I heard you had returned to town yesterday. Well, what of the old people down in Wiltshire?"

Lord Evelyn was quite thrown off his guard by this frank cheerfulness. He forgot the uneasy forebodings with which he had left his house.

"Oh, capital old people!" he said, putting his hat and umbrella on the table—"excellent. But you see, Brand, it becomes a serious question if I have to bury myself in the country, and drink port-wine after dinner, and listen to full-blown, full-fed glorious old Tories, every time a sister of mine gets engaged to be married. And now that Rosalys has begun it, they'll all take to it, one after the other, like sheep jumping a ditch."

"They say Milbanke is a very nice young fellow," said Brand.

"Petted, a little. But then, an only son, and heaps of money: perhaps its natural. I know he is a ghastly hypocrite," added Lord Evelyn, who seemed to have some little grudge against his brother-in-law in prospect. "It was too bad of him to go egging on those old megatheria to talk politics until they were red in the face, denouncing Free-trade, and abusing the Ballot, and foretelling the ruin of the former as soon as the Education Act began to work. Then he pretended to be on their side—"

"What did you do?"

"I sat quiet. I was afraid I might be eaten. I relapsed into contemplation; and began to compose a volume on 'Tory Types: Some Survivals in English Politics. For the Information of Town Readers.'"

"Well, now you have done your duty, and cemented the alliance between the two families—by drinking port-wine, I suppose—what do you say to a little pleasure-trip?"

"Oh, is that all?" he said, looking up quickly. "Is that what your note meant?"

"The fact is, Evelyn," he said, with a trifle of embarrassment, "Natalie and her mother are in Naples, and I don't know precisely in what circumstances. I am a little anxious about them—I should like to know more of their surroundings: why, for one thing, I don't know whether they have

any money, even. I would go over myself, Evelyn, but the truth is I cannot—not very well. At least I ought not to go; and I thought, if you had time—being an old friend of Natalie's—you would like to see that she was all right.

"Where is Lind?" said Lord Evelyn, suddenly.

"Lind is in Italy also," said Brand, evasively.

"Not with them?"

"Oh no."

There was an awkward silence. At length Brand said,

"Something very serious has happened, Evelyn; and the question is whether, in the interests of the Society, it should not be kept a secret, if it is possible."

"I do not wish to know any secret," Lord Evelyn said, simply. "I am willing to go over to Naples at once, if I can be of any service."

"It is very kind of you; I thought you would say as much," Brand said, still hesitating. "But then I doubt whether you could be of much service unless you understood the whole situation of affairs. At present only two over here know what has occurred—Edwards and myself. Yes, I think you must know also. Read this letter; it came only last night."

He unlocked a drawer, took out a letter, and gave it to Lord Evelyn, who read it slowly. When he had finished, he put it on the table without a word.

"You understand?" Brand said, calmly. "That means that Lind is to be punished with death for treachery. Don't think about me; I've had a narrow escape, but I have escaped—thanks to Natalie's courage and decision. What I am concerned about is the effect that such a disclosure might have on the fortunes of the Society. Would it not provoke a widespread feeling of disgust? Wouldn't there always be a suspicion?"

"But you yourself, Brand!" Evelyn exclaimed, in amazement. "Why, you—I thought you would be the first to resign, after such an escape."

"I have fought all through that, Evelyn," he said, absently. "It was my first impulse—I confess it. The thought of being associated with such men sickened me; I despaired; I wished they had never been found out, and that I had been let blindly go on to the end. Well, I got over the fit—with a struggle. It was not reasonable, after all. Surely one's belief in the future of the Society ought to be all the firmer that these black sheep have been thrust out? As for myself, at all events, I ought to have more hope, not less. I never did trust Lind, as you know: I believed in his work, in the

usefulness of it, and the prospects of its success ; but I never was at ease in his presence ; I was glad to get away to my own work in the north. And now, with the way clearer, why should one think of giving up ? To tell you the truth, Evelyn, I would give anything to be in America at the present moment, if only Natalie and her mother were in safety. There is a chance for us there bigger than anything Lind ever dreamed about. You know the Granges, the associations of the 'Patrons of Husbandry,' that were founded by the Scotchman Saunders ? It is an immense social organization ; the success of it has been quite unprecedented ; they have an immense power in their hands. And it isn't only agriculture they deal with ; they touch on politics here and there ; they control elections ; and the men they choose are invariably men of integrity. Well, now, don't you see this splendid instrument ready-made ? From what I hear from Philadelphia—"

Lord Evelyn's thoughts were elsewhere than in Philadelphia.

"You must tell me about yourself, Brand !" he exclaimed. "Your life is no longer in danger, then ? How has it happened ?"

"Oh," said Brand, somewhat carelessly, "I don't know all the particulars as yet. What I do know is that Natalie and her mother disappeared from London ; I had no idea whither they had gone. Then Calabressa turned up ; and I heard that Natalie had appealed to the Council. Fancy, she, a young girl, had had the courage to go and appeal to the Council ! Then Calabressa suspected something, I saw by his questions ; then Lind, Beratinsky, and Reitzei appear to have been summoned to Naples. The result is in that letter ; that is about all I know."

"And these others in there ?" said Lord Evelyn, glancing to the door.

"They know nothing at all. That is what I am uncertain about : whether to leave the disappearance of Lind unaccounted for—merely saying he had been summoned away by the Council—or to let everybody who may hear of it understand that, powerful as he was, he had to succumb to the laws of the Society, and accept the penalty for his error. I am quite uncertain ; I have no instructions. You might find out for me in Naples, Evelyn, if you went over there—you might find out what they consider advisable."

"You are in Lind's place, then ?"

"Not at all," said he, quickly, and with a slight flush.

"Edwards and I are merely keeping the thing going until matters are settled. Did you notice whether Molyneux was in the next room when you came through?"

"Yes he was."

"Then excuse me for a minute or two. I want to speak to you further about Naples."

Brand was gone some time, and Lord Evelyn was left to ponder over these strange tidings. To him they were very joyful tidings; for ever since that communication was made to him of the danger that threatened his friend's life, he had been haunted by the recollection that, but for him, Brand would in all probability have never heard of this association. It was with an infinite sense of personal relief that he now knew this danger was past. Already he saw himself on his way to Naples, to find out the noble girl who had taken so bold a step to save her lover. Not yet had darkness fallen over these two lives.

Brand returned, carefully shut the door after him, and seated himself on a corner of the table.

"You see, Evelyn," he said, quite in his old matter-of-fact way, "I can't pretend to have very much regret over what has happened to Lind. He tried to do me an ill turn, and he has got the worst of it; that is all. On the other hand, I bear him no malice: you don't want to hurt a man when he is down. I can guess that it isn't the death-penalty that he is thinking most of now. I can even make some excuse for him, now that I see the story plain. The temptation was great; always on the understanding that he was against my marrying his daughter; and that I had been sure of it for some time. To punish me for not giving up my property, to keep Natalie to himself, and to get this difficult duty securely undertaken all at once—it was worth while trying for. But his way of going about it was shabby. It was a mean trick. Well, there is nothing more to be said on that point: he has played—played a foul game—and lost."

He added, directly afterward,

"So you think you can go to Naples?"

"Certainly," said Evelyn, with promptness. "You don't know how glad I am about this, Brand. If you had come to grief over your relations with this Society, it would have been like a mill-stone hanging on my conscience all my life. And I shall be delighted to go to Italy for you. I should like to see the look on Natalie's face."

"You will probably find her in great trouble," Brand said, gravely.

"In trouble?"

"Naturally. Don't you see, Evelyn, she could not have foreseen that the result of her appeal would involve the destruction of her father. It is impossible to believe that she could have foreseen that. I know her; she would not have stirred hand or foot. And now that this has been discovered, it is not her father's guilt she will be thinking of; it is his fate, brought about indirectly by herself. You may be sure, Evelyn, she will not be overjoyed at the present moment. All the more reason why one who knows her should be near her. I have no idea what sort of people are about her; I should be more satisfied if I knew you were there."

"I am ready to go; I am ready to start this afternoon, as I say," Evelyn repeated; but then he added, with some hesitation: "But I am not going to play the part of a hypocrite, Brand. I could not pretend to sympathize with her, if that is the cause of her trouble; I should tell her it served her father right."

"You could not be so brutal if you tried, Evelyn," Brand said; "you might think so: you could not tell her so. But I have no fear: you will be discreet enough, and delicate enough, when you see her."

"And what am I to say from you?"

"From me?" he said. "Oh, you can say I thank her for having saved my life. That will be enough, I think; she will understand the rest."

"I mean, what do you advise her to do? Ought they to return to England?"

"I think so, certainly. Most likely she will be waiting there, trying to get the Council to reverse the sentence. Having been successful in the one case, the poor child may think she ought to succeed in the other. I fear that is too much to expect. However, if she is anxious, she may try. I should like to know there was somebody near her she could rely on—don't you understand, Evelyn?—to see that she is situated and treated as you would like one of your own sisters to be."

"I see what it is, Brand," Lord Evelyn said, laughing, "you are jealous of the foreigners. You think they will be using tooth-picks in her presence, and that kind of thing."

"I wish to know that she and her mother are in a good hotel," said Brand, simply, "with proper rooms, and attendance, and—and a carriage: women can't go walking through these beastly streets of Naples. The long and short of it is, Evelyn," he added, with some embarrassment,

as he took out from his pocket-book two blank checks, and sat down at the table and signed them, "I want you to play the part of big brother to them, don't you know? And you will have to exercise skill as well as force. Don't you see, Calabressa is the best of fellows; but he would think nothing of taking them to stay in some vile restaurant, if the proprietor were politically inclined—"

"Yes, yes; I see: garlic; cigarettes during breakfast, right opposite the ladies; wine-glasses used as finger-glasses: well, you are a thorough Englishman, Brand!"

"I suppose, when your sisters go abroad, you see that they are directed to a proper hotel?" said Brand, somewhat angrily.

"I know this," said Evelyn, laughing, "that my sisters, and you, and Calabressa, and myself, all boiled together, wouldn't make half as good a traveller as Natalie Lind is. Don't you believe she has been led away into any slummy place, for the sake of politics or anything else. I will bet she knows the best hotels in Naples as well as you do the Waldegrave Club."

"At any rate, you've got to play the big brother, Evelyn; and it is my affair, of course; I will not allow you to be out of pocket by it. Here are two checks; you can fill them in over there when you see how matters stand; —, at Rome, will cash them."

"Do you mean to say I have to pay their hotel-bills?"

"If they have plenty of money, certainly not; but you must find out. You must take the bull by the horns. It is far more likely that they have so little money that they may be becoming anxious. Then you must use a firm hand—I mean with Natalie. Her mother will acquiesce. And you can tell Natalie that if she would buy something—some dress, or something—for the mother of old Calabressa, who is still living—at Spezia, I think—she would make the old chap glad. And that would be a mark of my gratitude also; you see, I have never had even the chance of thanking him as yet."

Lord Evelyn rose.

"Very well," said he, "I will send you a report of my mission. How am I to find them?"

"You must find them through Calabressa," he said, "for I have not got their address. So you can start this evening?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then I will telegraph at once to Calabressa to let them

know you are coming. Mind you, I am very grateful to you, Evelyn; though I wish I was going in your stead."

Lord Evelyn got some further instructions as to how he was to discover Calabressa on his arrival in Naples; and that evening he began his journey to the south. He set out, indeed, with a light heart. He knew that Natalie would be glad to have a message from England.

At Genoa he had to break the journey for a day, having some commission to perform on behalf of the Society: this was a parting bequest from Gathorne Edwards. Then on again; and in due time he entered Naples.

He scarcely noticed, as he entered the vehicle and drove away to his hotel, what bare-footed lads outside the station were bawling as they offered the afternoon papers to the newly-arrived passengers. What interest had he in Zaccatelli?

But what the news-venders were calling aloud was this:

"The death of the Cardinal Zaccatelli! Death of Zaccatelli! The death of the Cardinal Zaccatelli!"

CHAPTER LVII.

FAREWELL!

"NATALUSHKA," said the tender and anxious mother, laying her hand on the girl's head, "you must bestir yourself. If you let grief eat into your heart like that, you will become ill; and what shall we do then, in a strange hotel? You must bestir yourself; and put away those sad thoughts of yours. I can only tell you again and again that it was none of your doing. It was the act of the Council: how could you help it? And how can you help it now? My old friend Stefan says it is beyond recall. Come, Natalushka, you must not blame yourself; it is the Council, not you, who have done this; and no doubt they think they acted justly."

Natalie did not answer. She sighed slightly. Her eyes were turned toward the blue waters beyond the Castello dell'Ovo.

"Child," the mother continued, "we must leave Naples."

"Leave Naples!" the girl cried, with a sudden look of alarm; "having done nothing—having tried nothing?" Then she added, in a lower voice, "Well, yes, mother, I suppose it is true what they say, that one can do nothing by

remaining. Perhaps—perhaps we ought to go ; and yet it is terrible.”

She shivered slightly as she spoke.

“ You see, Natalushka,” her mother said, determined to distract her attention somehow, “ this is an expensive hotel ; we must be thinking of what money we have left to take us back. We have been here some time ; and it is a costly journey, all the way to England.”

“ Oh, but not to England—not to England, mother !” Natalie exclaimed, quickly.

“ Why not to England, then ? ”

“ Anywhere else, mother,” the daughter pleaded. If you wish it, we will go away : no doubt General von Zoesch knows best ; there is no hope. We will go away from Naples, mother ; and—and you know I shall not be much of a tax on you. We will live cheaply somewhere ; and perhaps I could help a little by teaching music, as Madame Potecki does. Whenever you wish it, I am ready to go.”

“ But why not to England ? ”

“ I cannot tell you, mother.”

She rose quickly, and passed into her own room and shut the door.

There she stood for a second or two, irresolute and breathless, like one who had just escaped into a place of refuge. Then her eyes fell on her writing desk, which was on a side-table, and open. Slowly, and with a strange, pained expression about her mouth, she went and sat down, and took out some writing materials, and absently and mechanically arranged them before her. Her eyes were tearless, but once or twice she sighed deeply. After a time she began to write with an unsteady hand :

“ MY DEAREST,—You must let me send you a few lines of farewell ; for it would be hard if, in saying good-bye, one were not permitted to say a kind word or two that could be remembered afterward. And your heart will have already told you why it is not for you and me now to look forward to the happiness that once seemed to lie before us. You know what a terrible result has followed from my rashness ; but then you are free—that is something ; for the rest, perhaps it is less misery to die, than to live and know that you have caused another’s death. You remember, the night they played *Fidelio*, I told you I should always try to remain worthy of your love ; and how could I keep that promise if I permitted myself to think of enjoying a happiness that was

made possible at the cost of my father's life? You could not marry a woman so unnatural, so horrible: a marriage purchased at such a price would be foredoomed; there would be a guilty consciousness, a life-long remorse. But why do I speak? Your heart tells you the same thing. There only remains for us to say good-bye, and to thank God for the gleam of happiness that shone on us for a little time.

"And you, my dearest of friends, you will send me also a little message, that I can treasure as a remembrance of by-gone days. And you must tell me also whether what has occurred has deterred you from going farther, or whether you still remain hoping for better things in the world, and resolved to do what you can to bring them about. That would be a great consolation to me, to know that your life still had a noble object. Then the world would not be quite blank, either for you or for me; you with your work, I with this poor, kind mother of mine, who needs all the affection I can give her. Then I hope to hear of you from time to time; but my mother and myself do not return to England.

"And now what am I to say, being so far away from you, that will sound pleasant to you, and that you will remember after with kindness? I look back now over the time since I have known you, and it appears a beautiful dream—anxious sometimes, and troubled, but always with a golden future before it that almost bewildered the eyes. And what am I to say of your goodness, so unvarying and constant; and your thoughtfulness; and your great unselfishness and outspokenness? When was there the least misunderstanding between us? I could read your heart like my own. Only once, you remember, was there a chance of a shadow coming between us—through my own folly; and yet perhaps it was only natural for a girl, fancying that everything was going to be smooth and happy in her life, to look back on what she had said in times of trouble, and to be afraid of having spoken with too little reserve. But then you refused to have even the slightest lovers' quarrel; you laughed away my folly. Do you wonder if I was more than ever glad that I had given my life into your wise and generous guidance? And it is not now, when I am speaking to you for the last time, that I can regret having let you know what my feelings were toward you. Oh, my darling! you must not imagine, because these words that I am writing are cold and formal, that my heart beats any the less quickly when I think of you and the days we were together. I said to you that I loved you; I say to

you now that I love you with my whole heart, and I have no feeling of shame. If you were here, I would look into your face and repeat it—I think without a blush; I would kiss you; I would tell you that I honor you; that I had looked forward to giving you all the trust and affection and devotion of a wife. That is because I have faith in you; my soul is open and clear to you; read, and if you can find there anything but admiration for your nobleness of heart, and earnest hopes for your happiness, and gratitude to you for all your kindness, then, and not otherwise, shall I have cause for shame.

“Now I have to send you my last word of good-bye—”

[She had borne up so far; but now she put the pen aside, and bent her head down on to her hands, and her frame was shaken with her sobbing. When she resumed, she could scarcely see for the bitter tears that kept welling her eyes.]

“—and you think, looking at these cold words on the paper, that it was easy for me to do so. It has not been so easy. I pray God to bless you, and keep you brave and true and unselfish, and give you happiness in the success of your work. And I ask a line from you in reply—not sad, but something that I may look at from time to time, and that will make me believe you have plenty of interests and hopes in the world, and that you do not altogether regret that you and I met, and were friends, for a time. NATALIE.”

This was a strange thing: she took another sheet of paper, and slowly and with a trembling hand wrote on it these words, “*Your Wife*.” That was all. No doubt it was the signature she had hoped one day to use. She regarded it long, and earnestly, and sadly, until, indeed, she could not see it for the tears that rose afresh into her eyes. Then she tore up the piece of paper hastily, folded her letter and addressed it, without sealing the envelope, and carried it into the other room.

“Read it mother,” she said; and she turned to the window to conceal her tear-stained face.

The mother opened the letter and glanced at it.

“You forget, child,” she said, “I know so little English. Tell me what it is you have written.”

So she was forced to turn; and apparently, as she spoke, she was quite calm; but there was a darkness underneath her eyes, and there was in her look something of the worn, sad expression of her mother’s face. Briefly and simply she repeated the substance of the letter, giving no reasons or

justifications. She seemed to take it for granted that her decision was unavoidable, and would be seen to be so by every one.

"Natalushka," the mother said, looking anxiously at the troubled face, "do you know what you are about to do? It is an act of expiation for something you have not committed."

"Could I do otherwise?" she said. "You, mother: would you have me think of a marriage procured through my father's death? It is too horrible!"

The mother went to her, and took her two hands.

"My poor child, are you to have no happier life than I have had, after all? When I used to see you, I used to say to myself, 'Ah, my little Natalushka will never know what has befallen me—she will have a happy life!' I could see you laughing as you walked in the gardens there. You looked so pleased, so content, so bright and cheerful. And now you also are to have a life of disappointment and sad memories—"

"Oh, you must not talk like that, mother," the girl said, hastily, in a low voice. "Have I not you with me? We shall always be together, shall we not? And you know we shall not have time for brooding over what is past; we shall have much to do; we must make a pleasant small home somewhere. Oh, there are many, many people far worse off in the world than we are. So you must think of getting away from Naples, mother; and think of where you would like to live, and where I should be most likely to be able to earn a little. The years will teach us to forget—and—and— And now you know why I do not wish to go back to England."

Her eyes were cast down, but she was forcing herself to speak quite cheerfully.

"You see, mother, my knowing English is a great advantage. If we were to go to one of the towns on the Riviera, like Nice or Mentone, where so many English families are, one might get pupils who would want to learn English songs as well as Italian and German—"

"Yes, yes, Natalushka; but I am not going to have you slave for me. The little allowance that my cousins send me will do very well for us two, though you will not get so fine dresses. Then, you see, Natalushka, Mentone or Nice would be a dear place to live in."

"Very well, mother," said the girl, with the same apparent cheerfulness, "I will go down and post my letter, and at the same time get the loan of a guide book. Then we shall study

the maps, and pick out a nice, quiet, remote little place. where we can live—and forget.”

The last two words were uttered to herself as she opened the door and went out. She sighed a little as she went down the staircase—that was all; she was thinking of things very far away. She passed into the hall, and went to the bureau for some postage-stamps. As she stood there, some one, unperceived, came up to her: it was Calabressa.

“Little daughter,” said he, in a trembling voice.

She uttered a slight cry, and shrunk back.

“Little daughter,” said he, holding out his hand.

But some strange instinct possessed her. She could not avoid touching his hand—or the tips of his fingers, rather—for one brief second; then she turned away from him with an involuntary shudder, and went back through the hall, her head bent down. Calabressa stood looking after her for a moment or two, then he turned and left the hotel.

He walked quickly: there were tears running down his face. He looked neither to the right nor to the left; he was talking in a broken voice to himself; he repeated again and again, “No, she shall not turn away from me. She will be sorry for that soon. She will say she should not have crushed the heart of her old friend Calabressa.”

He walked out to Posilipo. Near the villa where he had formerly sought the representatives of the Council he passed an old woman who was selling fruit by the roadside. She glanced up at him, and said,

“The door is closed, signore.”

“The door must be opened, good mother,” said he, scarcely regarding her as he hurried on.

Arrived in the garden of the villa, his summons brought out to the entrance of the grotto the Secretary Granaglia, who somewhat impatiently told him that it was quite impossible that any member of the Council should see him.

“And no doubt it is about that Lind affair?”

“Indirectly only,” Calabressa said. “No, it concerns myself mostly.”

“Quite enough time, the Council think, has been given to the Lind affair. I can tell you, my friend, there are more important matters stirring. Now, farewell; I am wanted within.”

However, by dint of much persuasion, Calabressa got Granaglia to take in a message to Von Zoesch. And, sure enough, his anticipations were correct; the good-natured,

bluff old soldier made his appearance, and seemed glad to get a breath of fresh air for a minute or two.

"Well, well, Calabressa, what is it now? Are you not all satisfied? the young lady with her sweetheart, and all that? You rogue! you guessed pretty rightly; to tell them the news was no light matter; but by-and-by she will become reconciled. Her lover is to be envied; she is a beautiful child, and she has courage. Well, are they not satisfied?"

"I crave your pardon, Excellency, for intruding upon you," Calabressa said, in a sort of constrained voice. "It is my own affair that brings me here. I shall not waste your time. Your Excellency, I claim to be substitute for Ferdinand Lind.

The tall soldier burst out laughing.

"What the devil is the matter with you, Calabressa; have you gone mad?"

For a second Calabressa stood silent; his eyes downcast; his fingers working nervously with the cap he held in his hands.

"Your Excellency," he said, as if struggling to repress some emotion, "it is a simple matter. I have been to see the beautiful child you speak of; I addressed her, in the hall of the hotel; she turned away from me, shuddering, as if I were a murderer—from me, who loves her more than I love life. Oh, your Excellency, do not smile at it; it is not a girlish caprice; she has a noble heart; it is not a little thing that would make her cruel. I know what she thinks—that I have been the means of procuring her father's death. Be it so. I will give her father his life again. Take mine—what do I care?"

"Nonsense, nonsense, my Calabressa. The girl has bewitched you. One must talk to her. Take your life in exchange for that of Lind? Pooh! We cannot send good men after bad; you are too valuable to us; whereas he, if he were released, could be of no more use at all. It is a generous notion on your part, friend Calabressa, but it is quixotic; moreover, impossible."

"You forget, Excellency, that I can claim it," said Calabressa, firmly. "Under Article V. I can claim to be the substitute of Ferdinand Lind. Your Excellency yourself has not the power to refuse me. I call upon you to release Lind from the death-penalty: to-morrow I will take his place; then you can send a message to—to Natalie Berezolyi's daughter, that, if I have wronged her, I have made amends."

Von Zoesch grew more serious; he eyed Calabressa curi-

ously. The elder man stood there trembling a little with nervous excitement, but with a firm look on his face : there was no doubt about his resolve.

"Friend Calabressa," said Von Zoesch, in a kindly way, "it seems as if you had transferred your old love for Natalie Berezolyi to Natalie's daughter, only with double intensity : but, you see, we must not allow you to sacrifice yourself merely because a girl turns her heel on you. It is not to be thought of. We cannot afford to lose you ; besides, it is monstrous that the innocent should suffer, and the guilty go free—"

"The articles of the Society, your Excellency—"

"That particular article, my Calabressa, was framed with a view to encourage self-sacrifice and generosity, no doubt ; but not with a view, surely, to any such extreme madness as this. No. The fact is, I had no time to explain the circumstances of the case to the young lady, or I could easily have shown her how you were no more involved than herself in procuring the decree against her father. To-day I cannot ; to-morrow I cannot ; the day after to-morrow, I solemnly assure you, I will see her, and reason with her, and convince her that you have acted throughout as her best friend only could have done. You are too sensitive, my Calabressa : ah, is it not the old romance recalled that is making you so ? But this I promise you, that she shall beg your pardon for having turned away from you."

"Then," said Calabressa, with a little touch of indignant pride, "then your Excellency imagines that it is my vanity that has been wounded ?"

"No ; it is your heart. And she will be sorry for having pained a true friend : is not that as it should be ? Why, your proposal, if she agreed to it, what would be the result ? You would stab her with remorse. For this momentary slight you would say, 'See, I have killed myself. Learn now that Calabressa loved you.' But that would be very like revenge, my Calabressa ; and you ought not to think of taking revenge on the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi."

"Your Excellency—"

Calabressa was about to protest ; but he was stopped.

"Leave it to me, my friend. The day after to-morrow we shall have more leisure. Meanwhile, no more thoughts of quixotism. *Addio !*"

CHAPTER LVIII.

A SACRIFICE.

It would be difficult to say whether Calabressa was altogether sincere in claiming to become the substitute for Ferdinand Lind, or whether he was not practising a little self-deception, and pacifying his wounded pride and affection by this outburst of generosity, while secretly conscious that his offer would not be accepted. However, what Calabressa had declared himself ready to do, in a fit of wild sentimentalism, another had already done, in terrible earnest. A useless life had suddenly become ennobled by a tragic and self-sacrificing death.

Two days after Lord Evelyn left for Naples, Brand and Gathorne Edwards were as usual in the chambers in Lisle Street, and, the business of the morning being mostly over, they were chatting together. There was a brighter look on George Brand's face than there had been there for many a day.

"What an indefatigable fellow that Molyneux is!" Edwards was saying.

"It is a good thing some one can do something," Brand answered. "As for me, I can't settle down to anything. I feel as if I had been living on laughing-gas these last two days. I feel as if I had come alive again into another world, and was a little bit bewildered just as yet. However, I suppose we shall get shaken into our new positions by-and-by; and the sooner they let us know their final arrangements the better."

"As for me," said Edwards, carelessly, "now that I have left the the Museum I don't care where I may have to go."

At this moment a note was brought in by the old German, and handed to Edwards. He glanced at the straggling, almost illegible, address in pencil on the dirty envelope.

"Well, this is too bad," he said, impatiently.

"What is it?"

"That fellow Kirski. He is off again, I can see by his writing. He never was very good at it; but this is the handwriting of delirium tremens."

He opened the letter, and glanced at the first page.

"Oh yes," he said, in disgust, "he's off again, clearly."

"What does he say?"

"The usual rigmarole—only not quite so legible: the

beautiful angel who was so kind to him—he has taken her portrait from its hiding-place—it is sacred now—no more public house—well, it looks rather as if he had been to several.”

At this point, however, Edwards’s pale, high forehead flushed a little.

“I wish I had not told him; but he speaks of Miss Lind being in trouble—and he says God never meant one so beautiful and kind as she to be in trouble—and if her father—”

His face grew grave.

“What is this?”

He turned the leaf suddenly, and glanced at the remainder of the letter.

“Good God! what does the man mean? What has he done?” he exclaimed.

His face was quite pale. The letter dropped from his hands. Then he jumped to his feet.

“Come, Brand—quick—quick!” he said, hurriedly. “You must come with me—”

“But what is the matter?” Brand said, following him in amazement.

“I don’t know,” said Edwards, almost incoherently. “He may be raving—it may only be drunkenness—but he says he is about to kill himself in place of Lind: the young lady shall not be troubled—she was kind to him, and he is grateful. I am to send her a message.”

By this time the two friends were hurrying to the dingy little thoroughfare in which Kirski had his lodgings.

“Don’t alarm yourself, Edwards,” said Brand; “he has broken out again, that is all.”

“I am not so sure. He was at his work yesterday, and sober enough.”

“His brain may have given way, then; it was never very strong. But these continual ravings about murder or suicide are dangerous; they will develop into homicidal mania, most likely; and if he cannot get at his enemy Michaieloff he may do a mischief to somebody else.”

“I hope he has not done a mischief to himself already,” said Edwards, who had had more opportunities than his companion of studying the workings of Kirski’s disordered brain.

They reached the house and knocked at the door. The landlady made her appearance.

“Is Kirski in the house?” Edwards asked, eagerly.

“No, he ain’t,” she said, with but scant courtesy.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, in great relief. "You are sure? He went out to his work as usual?"

"How should I know?" said the woman, who was evidently not on good terms with her lodger.

"He had his breakfast as usual?"

"His breakfast!" she said scornfully. "No, he hadn't. He may pick up his breakfast about the streets, like a cat; but he don't have any 'ere. And a cat he is, sneaking up and down the stairs: how do I know whether he is in the house or whether he ain't?"

At this Edwards turned pale again with a sudden fear. Brand interposed.

"You don't know? Then show us his room; we will see for ourselves."

He passed the woman, leaving her to shut the door, and went into the small dark passage, waiting for her at the foot of the stairs. Grumbling to herself, she came along to show them the way. It did not pay her to waste her time like this, she said, for a lodger who took no food in the house, and spent his earnings in the gin-shop. She should not be surprised if they were to find him asleep at that time of the day. He had ways like a cat.

The landing they reached was as dark as the staircase; so that when she turned a handle and flung a door open there was a sudden glare of light. At the same moment she uttered a shrill scream, and retreated backward. She had caught a glimpse of some horrible thing—she hardly knew what. It was the body of the man Kirski lying prone upon the uncarpeted floor, his hands clinched. There was a dark pool of blood beside him.

Edwards sunk shuddering into a chair, sick and faint. He could neither move nor speak; he dared hardly look at the object lying there in the wan light. But Brand went quickly forward, and took hold of one of these clinched hands. It was quite cold. He tried to turn over the body, but relinquished that effort. The cause of death was obvious enough. Kirski had stabbed himself with one of the tools used in his trade; either he had deliberately lain down on the floor to make sure of driving the weapon home, or he had accidentally fallen so after dealing himself the fatal blow. Apparently he had been dead for some hours.

Brand rose. The landlady at the door was alternately screaming and sobbing; declaring that she was ruined; that not another lodger would come to her house.

"Be quiet, woman, and send to the police-station at once,"

Brand said. "Wait a moment : when did you last see this man ? "

"This morning, sir—early this morning, sir," said she, in a profusion of tears over her prospective loss. "He came down-stairs with a letter in his hand, and there was twopence for my little boy to take it when he came home from school. How should I know he had gone back, sir, to make away with himself like that, and ruin a poor widow woman, sir ? "

"Have you a servant in the house ? "

"No sir ; no one but myself—and me dependent—"

"Then go at once to the police-station, and tell the inspector on duty what has happened. You can do that, can't you ? You will do no good by standing crying there, or getting the neighbors in. I will stop here till you come back."

She went away, leaving Brand and his paralyzed companion with this ghastly object lying prone on the floor.

"Poor devil ! " Brand said ; "his troubles are at an end now. I wonder whether I should lift him on to the bed, or wait until they come."

Then another thought struck him ; and he turned quickly to his companion, who sat there horrified and helpless.

"Edwards," said he, "you must pull yourself together. The police will ask you what you know about this affair. Then you will have to give evidence before the coroner's inquest. There is nothing material for you to conceal ; but still, no mention must be made of Lisle Street, do you understand ? "

Edwards nodded. His face was of a ghastly white. Then he rose, and said,

"Let us go somewhere else, Brand."

His companion took him down-stairs into the landlady's parlor, and got him a glass of water. Apparently there was not a human being in the house but themselves.

"Do you understand, Edwards ? Give your private address—not Lisle Street. Then you can tell the story simply enough : that unfortunate fellow came all the way from Russia—virtually a maniac—you can tell them his story if you like ; or shall I ? "

"Yes, yes. It has been too much for me, Brand. You see, I had no business to tell him about Lind—"

"The poor wretch would have ended his days miserably anyhow, no doubt in a mad-house, and probably after killing some quite innocent person. By-the-way, they will ask you how you came to suspect. Where is that letter ? "

Edwards took it from his pocket.

“Tear it up.”

He did so; but Brand took the fragments and put them in his own pocket.

“You can tell them he wrote to you, and from the madness of the letter you thought something was wrong. You destroyed the letter. But where is Natalie’s portrait?—that must not fall into their hands.”

He instantly went up-stairs again, leaving his companion alone. There was something strange in his entering this room where the corpse lay; it seemed necessary for him to walk on tiptoe: he uncovered his head. A glance round the almost empty room speedily showed him what he wanted; there was a small wooden casket in a dusky corner by the window, and that, he made no doubt, was the box the unhappy Kirski had made to contain Natalie’s portrait, and that he had quite recently dug out from its place of concealment. Brand was surprised, however, to find the casket empty. Then he glanced at the fireplace; there was a little dust there, as of burnt card-board. Then he made sure that Kirski himself had taken steps to prevent the portrait falling into alien hands.

Beside the box, however, lay a piece of paper, written over in pencil. He took it up and made out it was chiefly ill-spelled Italian: “*Whatever punishment may be decreed against any Officer, Companion, or Friend of the Society, may be vicariously borne by any other Officer, Companion, or Friend, who, of his own full and free consent, acts as substitute—the original offender becoming thereby redeemed, acquitted, and released.*” Then followed some words which he could not make out at all.

He carried the paper down-stairs.

“He appears to have burnt the photograph, Edwards; but he has left this—see.”

Edwards glanced at the trembling scrawl with a slight shiver; the handwriting was the same as that he had received half an hour before.

“It is only Article V.,” he said. “The poor fellow used to keep repeating that, after Calabressa and I taught him in Venice.”

“But what is written below?”

Edwards forced himself to take the paper in his hands, and to scan more carefully its contents.

“It is Russian,” he said, “but so badly written. ‘*My life is not endurable longer, but I shall die happy in being of service to the beautiful angel who was kind to me. Tell her she need not*

be in trouble any more. I forgive Pavel Michaieloff, as my masters desire. I do not wish my wife or my neighbors to know what I have done.' "

"This we have no right to meddle with," Brand said, thoughtfully. "I will put it back where I got it. But you see, Edwards, you will have to admit that you were aware this poor wretch was in communication with some secret society or other. Further than that you need say nothing. The cause of his suicide is clear enough; the man was mad when he came to England with that wild craving for revenge in his brain."

Brand carried the paper up-stairs again, and placed it where he had found it. At the same moment there was a sound of footsteps below; and presently the police-officers, accompanied by the landlady and by Gathorne Edwards, who had somewhat recovered his composure, entered to hold their preliminary investigation. The notes that the inspector took down in his pocketbook were brief enough, and were mostly answers to questions addressed to Brand, regarding what he knew of the deceased man's circumstances. The police-surgeon had meanwhile had the body placed on the bed; he also was of opinion that the man had been dead some hours. Edwards translated for the inspector the writing on the paper found lying there, and said he believed Kirski had some connection with a secret society, but that it was obvious he had destroyed himself from despair; and that, indeed, the unhappy man had never been properly right in his mind since ever he had known him, though they had hoped, by getting him to do steady work and sure wages, to wean him away from brooding over the wrongs that had driven him from his native country. Edwards gave the officer his address, Brand saying that he had to leave England that same night, and would not be available for any further inquiry, but that his friend knew precisely as much about the case as himself. Then he and his companion left.

Edwards breathed more freely when he got out of the house, even into the murky atmosphere of Soho.

"It is a tragic end," he said, "but perhaps it is the best that could have befallen him. I called yesterday at the shop, and found he was there, and sober, though I did not see him. I was surprised to find he had gone back."

"I thought he had solemnly promised you not to drink any more," Brand said.

"He had made the same promises before. He took to drink merely to forget—to drown this thing that was working

in his brain. If he had lived, it would have been the old story over again. He would have buried the portrait in St. James's Park, as he did before, gone back to the gin-shop, and in course of time drank himself to death. This end is terrible enough, but there is a touch of something fine about it—it redeems much. What a worship the poor fellow had for Miss Lind, to be sure ; because she was kind to him when he was half mad with his wrongs. I remember he used to go about the churches in Venice to see if any of the saints in the pictures were like her, but none satisfied him. You will send her a message of what he has done to repay her at last ? ”

“ I will take it myself,” said Brand, hastily. “ I must go, Edwards. You must get —— or —— to come to these chambers—any one you may think of. I must go myself, and at once.”

“ To-night, then ? ”

“ Yes, to night. It is a pity I troubled Evelyn to go.”

“ He would stay a day, perhaps two days, in Genoa. It is just possible you might overtake him by going straight through.”

“ Yes,” said Brand, with a strange smile on his face, as if he were looking at something far away, and it was scarcely to his companion that he spoke, “ I think I will go straight through. I should not like any one but myself to take Natalie this news.”

They walked back to the chambers, and Brand began to put things in order for his going.

“ It is rather a shame,” he said, during this business, “ for one to be glad that this poor wretch has come to such an end ; but what better could have happened to him, as you say ? You will see about a decent funeral, Edwards ; and I will leave you something to stop the mouth of that caterwauling landlady. You can tell them at the inquest that he has no relations in this country.”

By-and-by he said,

“ If there are any debts, I will pay them ; and if no one has any objection I should like to have that casket, to show to—to Miss Lind. Did you see the carving on it ? ”

“ I looked at it.”

“ He must have spent many a night working at that. Poor wretch, I wish I had looked after him more, and done more for him. One always feels that when people are dead, and it is too late.”

“ I don't see how you could have done more for him,” Ed-

wards said, honestly enough ; though indeed it was he himself who had been Kirski's chief protector of late.

Before evening came Brand had put affairs in proper trim for his departure, and he left London with a lighter heart than had been his for a long time. But ever and anon, as he journeyed to the south, with a wonderful picture of joy and happiness before him, his mind would wander away back to the little room in Soho, and he could see the unhappy Russian lying dead, with the message left behind for the beautiful angel who had been kind to him ; and he could not but think that Kirski would have died happier if he had known that Natalie herself would come some day and put flowers, tenderly and perhaps even with tears, on his grave. Who that knew her could doubt but that that would be her first act on returning to England ? At least, Brand thought so.

CHAPTER LIX.

NATALIE SPEAKS.

It was about five in the morning, and as yet dark, when George Brand arrived in Naples. He wrote a note asking Calabressa to call on him, and left it to be despatched by the porter of the hotel ; then he lay down for an hour or two, without undressing, for he was somewhat fatigued with his continuous travelling.

On going down to breakfast he got Calabressa's answer, saying he was very sorry he could not obey the commands of his dear friend Monsieur Brand, because he was on duty ; but that he could be found, if Monsieur Brand would have the goodness to seek out the wine-vaults of one Tommaso, in the Vicolo Isotta. There, also, Monsieur Brand would see some others.

Accordingly, after breakfast Brand set out, leisurely and observantly, for he did not think there was any great hurry. It was a beautiful, brisk, breezy morning, though occasionally a squall of rain swept across the roughened sea, blotting out Capri altogether. There were crisp gleams of white on the far plain, and there was a dazzling mist of sunlight and sea-foam where the waves sprung high on the rocks of the citadel ; and even here in the busy streets there was a fresh sea-odor as the gusts of the damp wind blew along. Naples was alive and busy, but Brand regarded this swarming popu-

lation with but little interest. He knew that none of his friends would be out and abroad so early.

In due time he found out the gloomy little court and the wine-vaults. Moreover, he had no trouble with the ghoul-like Tommaso, who had apparently received his instructions. No sooner had Brand inquired for Calabressa than he was invited to follow his guide, who waddled along, candle in hand, like some over-grown orang-outang. At length they reached the stair-case, where there was a little more light, and here he found Calabressa waiting to receive him. Calabressa seemed overjoyed.

"Yes, yes, my dear Monsieur Brand, you have arrived opportunely. You also will remonstrate with that beautiful child for having fallen out with her old friend Calabressa. Think of it! one who would wear his knees out to serve her; and when I go to the hotel—"

"One word, Calabressa," said Brand, as he followed him into a small empty room. "Tell me, is Lind in Naples?"

"Assuredly. He has petitioned for a year's grace: he wishes to join the Montenegrins."

"He will have more than a year's grace," said Brand, gravely. "Something has happened. You remember the man Kirski? Well, he has killed himself to release Lind."

"Just Heaven!" Calabressa exclaimed; but the exclamation was one of astonishment, not in the least of regret. On the contrary, he began to speak in tones of exultation.

"Ah, let us hear now what the beautiful child will say! For who was it that reclaimed that savage animal, and taught him the beautifulness of self-sacrifice, and showed him how the most useless life could be made serviceable and noble? Who but I? He was my pupil: I first watched the light of virtue beginning to radiate through his savage nature. That is what I will ask the beautiful Natalushka when I see her. Perhaps she will not again turn away from an old friend—"

"You seem to forget, Calabressa, that your teaching has brought this man to his death," Brand said.

"Why not?" said Calabressa, with a perfectly honest stare. "Why not? Was it not well done? Was it not a fitting end? Why I, even I, who watched him long, did not expect to see that: his savagery falling away from him bit by bit; himself rising to this grand height, that he should give his life to save another: I tell you it is a beautiful thing; he has understood what I taught him; he has seen clear."

Calabressa was much excited, and very proud. It seemed

to him that he had saved a soul as he remarked in his ornate French.

"Perhaps it has all happened for the best," Brand said; "perhaps it was the best that could have befallen that poor devil, too. But you are mistaken, Calabressa, about his reasons for giving up his life like that. It was not for the sake of a theory at all, admirable as your teachings may have been; it was for the sake of Natalie Lind. He heard she was in trouble, and he learned the cause of it. It was gratitude to her—it was love for her—that made him do this."

Calabressa changed his ground in an instant.

"Assuredly—assuredly, my dear friend: do you think I fail to understand that—I, who perceived that he worshipped that beautiful child as if she were a saint, and more than all the saints—do you think I cannot mark that—the sentiment of love, the fervor of worship, growing brighter and purer day by day until it burst into the beautiful flame of self-sacrifice? My faith! this must be told at once. Remain here a few moments, my dear Mr. Brand. This is news indeed."

"Wait a bit, Calabressa. I came to you to get the name of Natalie's hotel: and where is Lord Evelyn?"

"One moment—one moment," said the old albino, as he went out and shut the door behind him.

When Calabressa ceased to talk in French, he ceased to use roundabout literary sentimental metaphors; and his report, delivered in the next room, would appear to have been brief enough; for almost immediately he returned, accompanied by Von Zoesch, to whom Brand was introduced.

"I am honored in making your acquaintance," the tall soldier said, in a pleasant way. "I have heard much of you; you are a good worker; likewise you do not flinch when a duty is demanded of you. Perhaps, if you would only condescend to re-enforce the treasury sometimes, the Council would be still further grateful to you. However, we are not to become beggars at a first interview—and that a short one, necessarily—for to-day we start for Genoa."

"I am sorry for that," Brand said, simply. "There were some representations I wished to lay before the Council—some very serious representations."

"Perhaps some other time, then. In the mean while, our hands are full. And that reminds me that the news you bring makes one of my tasks to-day a pleasant one. Yes, I remember something of that maniac-fellow babbling about a saint and an angel—I heard of it. So it was your beautiful Miss Lind who was the saint and the angel? Well, do you

know that I was about to give that young lady a very good scolding to-day?"

Brand flushed quickly. The authority of the Council had no terrors for him where Natalie was concerned.

"I beg to remind you," he said, respectfully but firmly, "that the fact of Miss Lind's father being connected with the Society gives no one the right to intermeddle in her private affairs—"

"Oh, but, my dear sir," said Von Zoesch, laughing, "I have ample right. Her mother Natalie and I are very old friends indeed. You have not seen the charming young lady, then, since your arrival?"

"No."

"Excellent—excellent! You shall come and hear the scolding I have to give her. Oh, I assure you it will not harm her much. Calabressa will bring you along to the Villa Odelschalchi, eleven sharp. We must not keep a lady—two ladies, indeed—waiting, after making an appointment."

He rose from the plain wooden chair on which he had been sitting; and his visitor had to rise also. But Brand stood reluctant to go, and his brows were drawn down.

"I beg your pardon," said he, "but if you are so busy, why not depute some friend of the young lady to carry her a message? A girl is easily frightened."

"No, no, my dear sir; having made an appointment, must we not keep it? Come, I shall expect you to make one of the party; it will be a pleasant little comedy before we go to more serious matters. *Au revoir!*" He bowed slightly, and withdrew.

Some little time afterward Brand, Evelyn, and Calabressa were driving along the rough streets in an open carriage. The presence of Lord Evelyn had been a last concession obtained from General von Zoesch by Calabressa.

"Why not?" Von Zoesch had said, good-naturedly; "he is one of us. Besides, there is nothing of importance at Portici. It is a little family party; it is a little comedy before we go to Genoa."

As they rattled along, Lord Evelyn was very talkative and joyous. He had seen Natalie the evening before, within an hour after his arrival. He was laughing at Brand for fearing she might have been induced to go to some wretched inn.

"I myself, did I not say to you it was a beautiful hotel?" said Calabressa, with a hurt air. "The most beautiful view in Naples."

"I think, after what she will hear to-day," said Evelyn, she ought to ask us to dine there. That would be an English way of finishing up all her trials and troubles." But he turned to Calabressa with a graver look. "What about Lind? Will they reinstate him now? Will they send him back to England?"

"Reinstate him in office?" said Calabressa, with a scornful smile. "My faith, no! Neither him nor Beratinsky. They will give them letters to Montenegro: isn't it enough?"

"Well, I think so. And Reitzei?"

"Reitzei has been stationed at Brindisi—one of our moral police; and lucky for him also."

When they arrived at the Villa Odelschalchi they were shown into a little anteroom where they found Granaglia, and he was introduced to the two strangers.

"Who have come?" Calabressa said, in a low voice.

The little sallow-faced Secretary smiled.

"Several Brothers of the Council," he said. "They wish to see this young lady who has turned so many heads. You, for example, my Calabressa, are mad with regard to her. Well, they pay her a compliment. It is the first time any woman has been in the presence of the Council."

At this moment Von Zoesch came in, and hastily threw aside his travelling-cloak.

"Come, my friends," said he; and he took them with him, leaving Granaglia to receive the ladies when they should arrive.

The lofty and spacious apartment they now entered, on the other side of the corridor, was apparently one of a suite of rooms facing the sea. Its walls were decorated in Pompeian fashion, with simulated trellis-work, and plenty of birds, beasts, and fishes about; but the massive curtains and spreading chandeliers were all covered over as if the house had not been inhabited for some time. All that was displayed of the furniture of the chambers were some chairs of blue satin, with white and gold backs and legs; and these looked strange enough, seeing that they were placed irregularly round an oblong, rough deal table, which looked as if it had just come from the workshop of some neighboring carpenter. At or near this table several men, nearly all elderly, were sitting, talking carelessly to each other; one of them, indeed, at the farthest corner, was a venerable patriarch, who wore a large soft wide-awake over his snow-white hair. At the head of the table sat the handsome, pale-faced, Greek-looking man who has been mentioned as one Conventz. He was writing

a letter, but stopped when Brand and Evelyn were introduced to him. Then Calabressa drew in some more of the gilt and blue chairs, and they sat down close by.

Brand kept anxiously looking toward the door. He had not long to wait. When it opened, Granaglia appeared, conducting into the room two figures dressed in black. These dark figures looked impressive in the great, white, empty room.

For a second Natalie stood bewildered and irresolute, seeing all these faces turned to her; and when her eyes fell on her lover, she turned deadly pale. But she went forward, along with her mother, to the two chairs brought for them by Granaglia, and they sat down. The mother was veiled. Natalie glanced at her lover again; there was a strange look in his face, but not of pain or fear.

"My dear young lady," said Von Zoesch, in his pleasantest way, "we have nothing but good news to communicate to you, so you must not be alarmed. You are among friends. We are going away to-day; we all wish to say good-bye to you, and wish you a happy journey back to England; that is all. But I will tell you that my first object in asking you to come here was to give you a good rating; when you and I should have been alone together I would have asked you if you had no consideration for old friends, that you should have turned away from my colleague, Calabressa, and wounded him grievously. I would have reminded you that it was not he, but you yourself, who put the machinery in motion which secured your father's righteous conviction."

"I ask you to spare me, signore," the girl said, in a low and trembling voice.

"Oh, I am not now going to scold you, my dear young lady I intended to have done so. I intended to have shown you that you were wrong, and exceedingly ungrateful, and that you ought to ask pardon of my friend Calabressa. However, it is all changed. You need not fear him any more; you need not turn away from him. Your father is pardoned, and free!"

She looked up, uncertain, as if she had not heard aright.

"I repeat: your father is pardoned, and free. You shall learn how and why afterward. Meanwhile you have nothing before you, as I take it, but to reap the reward of your bravery."

She did not hear this last sentence. She had turned quickly to her mother.

"Mother, do you hear?" she said in a whisper.

"Yes, yes, child: thank God!"

"Now, you see, my dear young lady," Von Zoesch continued, "it is not a scolding, but good news I have given you; and nothing remains but that you should bid us good-bye, and say you are not sorry you appealed to us when you were in trouble, according to the advice of your good friend Calabressa. See, I have brought here with me a gentleman whom you know, and who will see you safe back to Naples, and to England; and another, his companion, who is also, I understand, an old friend of yours: you will have a pleasant party. Your father will be sent to join in a good cause, where he may retrieve his name if he chooses; you and your friends go back to England. So I may say that all your wishes are gratified at last, and we have nothing now but to say good-bye!"

The girl had been glancing timidly and nervously at the figures grouped round the table, and her breast was heaving. She rose; perhaps it was to enable herself to speak more freely; perhaps it was only out of deference to those seated there.

"No," she said, in a low voice, but it was heard clearly enough in the silence. "I—I would say a word to you—whom I may not see again. Yes, I thank you—from my heart; you have taken a great trouble away from my life. I—I thank you; but there is something I would say."

She paused for a second. She was very pale. She seemed to be nerving herself for some effort; and, strangely enough, her mother's hand, unseen, was stretched up to her, and she clasped it and held it tight. It gave her courage.

"It is true, I am only a girl; you are my elders, and you are men; but I have known good and brave men who were not ashamed to listen to what a woman thought was right; and it is as a woman that I speak to you," she said; and her voice, low and timid as it was, had a strange, pathetic vibration in it, that went to the heart. "I have suffered much of late. I hope no other woman will ever suffer in the same way."

Again she hesitated, but for the last time.

"Oh, gentlemen, you who are so powerful, you who profess to seek only mercy and justice and peace, why should you, also, follow the old, bad, cruel ways, and stain yourselves with blood? Surely it is not for you, the friends of the poor, the champions of the weak, the teachers of the people, to rely on the weapon of the assassin! When you go to the world, and seek for help and labor, surely you should go with clean hands—so that the wives and the sisters and the daughters of those who may join you may not have their lives made terrible to

them. It is not a reign of terror you would establish on the earth ! For the sake of those who have already joined you—for the sake of the far greater numbers who may yet be your associates—I implore you to abandon these secret and dreadful means. Surely, gentlemen, the blessing of Heaven is more likely to follow you and crown your work if you can say to every man whom you ask to join you, ‘ You have women-folk around you. They have tender consciences, perhaps ; but we will ask of you nothing that your sister or your wife or your daughter would not approve.’ Then good men will not be afraid of you ; then brave men will not have to stifle their conscience in serving you ; and whether you succeed or do not succeed, you will have walked in clear ways.”

Her mother felt that she was trembling ; but her voice did not tremble—beyond that pathetic thrill in it which was always there when she was deeply moved.

“ I have to beg your pardon, sir,” she said, addressing herself more particularly to Von Zoesch, but scarcely daring to lift her eyes. “ But—but do not think that, when you have made everything smooth for a woman’s happiness, she can then think only of herself. She also may think a little about others ; and even with those who are nearest and dearest to her, how can she bear to know that perhaps they may be engaged in something dark and hidden, something terrible—not because it involves danger but because it involves shame ? Gentlemen, if you choose, you can do this. I appeal to you. I implore you. If you do not seek the co-operation of women—well, that is a light matter ; you have our sympathy and love and gratitude—at least you can pursue ways and means of which women can approve ; ways and means of which no one, man or woman, needs be ashamed. How otherwise are you what you profess to be—the lovers of what is just and true and merciful ? ”

She sat down, still all trembling. She held her mother’s hand. There was a murmur of sympathy and admiration.

Brand turned to Von Zoesch, and said, in a low voice,

“ You hear, sir ? These are the representations I had wished to lay before the Council. I have not a word to add.”

“ We will consider by-and-by,” said Von Zoesch, rising. “ It is not a great matter. Come to me in Genoa as you pass through.”

But the tall old gentleman with the long white hair had already risen and gone round to where the girl sat, and put his hand on her shoulder.

“ My noble child, you have spoken well,” said he, in a

quavering, feeble voice. "Forgive me that I come so near; my eyes are very weak now; and you—you do not recognize me any more?"

"Anton!" said the mother.

"Child," said he, still addressing Natalie, "it is old Anton Pepczinski who is speaking to you. But you are disturbed; and I have greatly changed, no doubt. No matter. I have travelled a long way to bring you my blessing, and I give it to you now: I shall not see you again in this world. You were always brave and good; be that to the end; God has given you a noble soul."

She looked up, and something in her face told him that she had recognized him, despite, the changes time had made.

"Yes, yes," he said, in great delight; "you remember now that you used to bring me tobacco for my pipe, and ask if I would fight for your country; I can see it in your eyes, my child: you remember, then, the old Anton Pepczinski who used to bring you sweet things? Now come and take me to the English gentleman; I wish to speak to him. Tell me, does he love you—does he understand you?"

She was silent, and embarrassed.

"No! you will not speak?" the old man said, laughing; "you cast your eyes down again. See, now, how one changes! for in former days you made love openly enough—oh yes!—to me, to me myself—oh, my dear, I can remember. I can remember very well. I am not so old that I cannot remember."

Brand rose when he saw them coming. She regarded him earnestly for a brief second or two, and said something to him in English in an undertone, not understood by those standing round.

CHAPTER LX.

NEW SHORES.

THE moonlight lay on the moving Atlantic, and filled the hollow world with a radiance soft and gray and vague; but it struck sharp and white on the polished rails and spars of this great steamer, and shone on the long and shapely decks, and on the broad track of foam that went away back and back and back until it was lost in the horizon. It was late; and nearly all the passengers had gone below. In the silence there was only heard the monotonous sound of the engines, and the con-

tinuous rush and seething of the waters as the huge vessel clove its way onward.

Out there by the rail, in the white light, Natalie Lind lay back in her chair, all wrapped up in furs, and her lover was by her side, on a rug on the deck, his hand placed over her hand.

"To-morrow, then, Natalie," he was saying, "you will get your first glimpse of America."

"So you see I have procured your banishment after all," she said, with a smile.

"Not you," was the answer. "I had thought of it often. For a new life, a new world; and it is a new life you and I are beginning together."

Here the bell in the steering-room struck the half-hour; it was repeated by the lookout forward. The sound was strange, in the silence.

"Do you know," he said, after a while, "after we have done a fair share of work, we might think ourselves entitled to rest; and what better could we do than go back to England for a time, and go down to the old place in Buckinghamshire? Then Mrs. Alleyne would be satisfied at last. How proud the old dame was when she recognized you from your portrait! She thought all her dreams had come true, and that there was nothing left but to the Checkers and carry off that old cabinet as a wedding present."

"Natalie," he said, presently, "how is it that you always manage to do the right thing at the right time? When Mrs. Alleyne took your mother and you in to the Checkers, and old Mrs. Diggles led you into her parlor and dusted the table with her apron, what made you think of asking her for a piece of cake and a cup of tea?"

"My dearest, I saw the cake in the bar!" she exclaimed.

"I believe the old woman was ready to faint with delight when you praised her currant-wine, and asked how she made it. You have a wonderful way of getting round people—whether by fair means or otherwise I don't know. Do you think if it had been anybody else but you who went to Von Zoesch in Genoa, he would have let Calabressa come with us to America?"

"Poor old Calabressa!" she said, laughing; "he is very brave now about the sea; but he was terribly frightened that bad night we had after leaving Queenstown."

Here some one appeared in the dusky recess at the top of the companion-stairs, and stepped out into the open.

"Are you people never coming below at all?" he said.

"I have to inform you, Miss Natalie, with your mamma's compliments, that she can't get on with her English verbs because of that fat girl playing Strauss; and that she is going to her cabin, and wants to know when you are coming."

"Now, at once," said Natalie, getting up out of her chair. "But wait a moment, Evelyn: I cannot go without bidding good-night to Calabressa. Where is Calabressa?"

"Calabressa! Oh, in the smoking-room, betting like mad, and going in for all the mock-auctions. I expect some of them will sit up all night to get their first sight of the land. The pilot expects that will be shortly after daybreak."

"You will be in time for that, Natalie, won't you?" Brand asked.

"Oh yes. Good-night, Evelyn!" and she gave him her hand.

Brand went with her down the companion-stairs, carrying her rugs and shawls. In the corridor she turned to bid him good-night also.

"Dearest," she said, in a low voice, "do you know what I have been trying all day—to get you to say one word, the smallest word, of regret?"

"But if I have no regret whatever, how can I express any?"

"Sure?"

He laughed, and kissed her.

"Good-night, my darling!"

"Good-night; God bless you!"

Then he made his way along the gloomy corridor again and up the broad zinc steps, and out into the moonlight. Evelyn was there, leaning with his arms on the hand-rail, and idly watching, far below, the gleams of light on the gray-black waves.

"It is too fine a night to go below," he said. "What do you say, Brand—shall we wait up for the daylight and the first glimpse of America?"

"If you like," said Brand, taking out his cigar-case, and hauling along the chair in which Natalie had been sitting.

They had the whole of this upper deck to themselves, except when one or other of the officers passed on his rounds. They could talk without risk of being overheard: and they had plenty to talk about—of all that had happened of late, of all that might happen to them in this new country they were nearing.

"Well," he said, "Evelyn, that settlement in Genoa clinched everything, as far as I am concerned. I have no longer any doubt, any hesitation: there is nothing to be con-

cealed now—nothing to be withheld, even from those who are content to remain merely as our friends. One might have gone on as before; for, after all, these death-penalties only attached to the officers; and the great mass of the members, not being touched by them, need have known nothing about them. But it is better now.”

“It was Natalie’s appeal that settled that,” Lord Evelyn said, as he still watched the shining waves.

“The influence of that girl is extraordinary. One could imagine that some magnetism radiated from her; or perhaps it is her voice, and her clear faith, and her enthusiasm. When she said something to old Anton Pepczinski, on bidding him good-bye—not about herself, or about him, but about what some of us were hoping for—he was crying like a child! In other times she might have done great things: she might have led armies.”

By-and-by he said,

“As for those decrees, what use were they? From all I could learn, only ten have been issued since the Society was in existence; and eight of those were for the punishment of officers, who ought merely to have been expelled. Of course you will get people like Calabressa, with a touch of theatrical-mindedness, who have a love for the terrorism such a thing can produce. But what use is it? It is not by striking down an individual here or there that you can help on any wide movement; and this great organization, that I can see in the future will have other things to do than take heed of personal delinquencies—except in so far as to purge out from itself unworthy members—its action will affect continents, not persons.”

“You can see that—you believe that, Brand?” Lord Evelyn, said, turning and regarding him.

“Yes, I think so,” he answered, without enthusiasm, but with simple sincerity. Presently he said, “You remember, Evelyn, the morning we turned out of the little inn on the top of the Niessen, to see the sun rise over the Bernese Alps?”

“I remember it was precious cold,” said Lord Evelyn, almost with a shiver.

“You remember, when we got to the highest point, we looked down into the great valleys, where the lakes and the villages were, and there it was still night under the heavy clouds. But before us, where the peaks of the Jungfrau, and the Wetterhorn, and the rest of them rose into the clear sky, there was a curious faint light that showed the day was coming. And we waited and watched, and the light grew strong.

er, and all sorts of colors began to show along the peaks. That was the sunrise. But down in the valleys everything was, misty and dark and cold—everything asleep ; the people there could see nothing of the new day we were looking at. And so I suppose it is with us now. We are looking ahead. We see, or fancy we see, the light before the others ; but, sooner or later, they will see it also, for the sunrise is bound to come.”

They continued talking, and they paced up and down the decks, while the half-hours and hours were struck by the bells. The moon was declining to the horizon. Long ago the last of the revellers had left the smoking-room, and there was nothing to interrupt the stillness but the surge of the waters.

Then again—

“Have you noticed Natalie’s mother of late ? It is a pleasure to watch the poor woman’s face ; she seems to drink in happiness by merely looking at her daughter ; every time that Natalie laughs you can see her mother’s eyes brighten.”

“I have noticed a great change in Natalie herself,” Evelyn said. “She is looking younger ; she has lost that strange, half-apprehensive expression of the eyes ; and she seems to be in excellent spirits. Calabressa is more devotedly her slave than ever.”

“You should have seen him when Von Zoesch told him to pack up and be off to America.”

By-and-by he said,

“You know, Evelyn, if you can’t stay in America with us altogether—and that would be too much to expect—don’t say anything as yet to Natalie about your going back. She has the notion that our little colony is to be founded as a permanency.”

“Oh, I am in no hurry,” said Evelyn, carelessly. “Things will get along at home well enough without me. Didn’t I tell you that, once those girls began to go, they would go, like lightning ? It is rough on Blanche, though, that Truda should come next. By-the-way, in any case, Brand, I must remain in America for your wedding.”

“Oh, you will, will you ?” said Brand. “Then that settles one point—you won’t be going back very soon.”

“Why ?”

“Of course, Natalie and I won’t marry until she is of age ; that is a good year and a half yet. Did you hear of Calabressa’s mad proposal that he should extort from Lind his consent to our marriage as the price of the good news that

he, Calabressa, had to reveal ? Like him, wasn't it ? an ingenious scheme."

"What did you say ?"

"Why, what could I say ? I would not be put under any obligation to Lind on any account whatever. We can wait ; it is not a long time."

The moonlight waned, and there was another light slowly declaring itself in the east. The two friends continued talking, and did not notice how that the cold blue light beyond the sea was gradually yielding to a silver-gray. The pilot and first mate, who were on the bridge, had just been joined by the captain.

The silver-gray in its turn gave place to a clear yellow, and high up one or two flakes of cloud became of a saffron-red. Then the burning edge of the sun appeared over the waves ; the world lightened ; the masts and funnels of the steamer caught the glory streaming over from the east. The ship seemed to waken also ; one or two stragglers came tumbling up from below, rubbing their eyes, and staring strangely around them ; but as yet no land was in sight.

The sunrise now flooded the sky and the sea ; the number of those on deck increased ; and at last there was an eager passing round of binoculars, and a murmur of eager interest. Those with sharp eyes enough could make out, right ahead, in the midst of the pale glow of the morning, a thin blue line of coast.

The great steamer surged on through the sunlit waters. And now even those who were without glasses could distinguish, here and there along that line of pale-blue land, a touch of yellowish-white ; and they guessed that the new world there was already shining with the light of the new day. Brand felt a timid, small hand glide into his. Natalie was standing beside him, her beautiful black hair a trifle dishevelled, perhaps, and her eyes still bearing traces of her having been in the realm of dreams ; but those eyes were full of tenderness, nevertheless, as she met his look. He asked her if, she could make out that strip of coast beyond the shining waters.

"Can you see, Natalie ? It is our future home !"

"Oh yes, I can see it," she said ; "and the sunrise is there before us : it is a happy sign."

* * * * *

There remains to be added only this—that about the last thing Natalie Lind did before leaving England was to go and plant some flowers, carefully and tenderly, on Kirski's grave ; and that about the first thing she did on landing in America

was to write to Madame Potecki, asking her to look after the little Anneli, and sending many loving messages : for this girl—or, rather, this beautiful child, as Calabressa would persist in calling her—had a large heart, that could hold many affections and many memories, and that was not capable of forgetting any one who had been kind to her.

THE END.

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